

I CORINTHIANS 2:1-5**LENT'S WISDOM AND POWER ARE NOT FROM YOURSELF**

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

What's the point of Lent? Special evening church services. A more subdued life-style—well, at least in former days—meaning, giving up something for the season, having no big celebrations like weddings, wearing no flashy outfits, no “Hallelujahs!” (“Praise the Lord!”) sung during the church service. Much of this has fallen by the wayside. But, of the “Lenten” customs that remain in your life, what's its purpose? The forty day season of Lent is not commanded in the Bible. It is a Christian custom, a very ingrained Christian custom. Is its purpose to look at ourselves and our sacrifices for God? Is its purpose a type of Memorial Day observation, on which we remember that Christ, like men in our military, lost His life “in battle”? That is not the idea. The season of Lent is a six-week span in which we see what God has done for us. Outside of ourselves, God has sent His Son to the rescue.

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the congregation founded in Corinth, Greece. (Please note that Paul was not one of the twelve disciples, but had been a Pharisee, persecuting Christians, and was himself converted by the grace of God.) Paul “proclaimed Christ” in Corinth on his second missionary journey. Corinth was 50 miles from famed Athens, Athens being a city of high learning and philosophy. Certainly the citizens of Corinth were well aware of the love of learning in Greek culture. Corinth was also a busy place with much commerce and trade traffic. It held a strategic location at the entrance to the great Greek peninsula—the Peloponnesus Peninsula. The land bridge or was a relatively narrow isthmus (about 6 miles wide) providing Corinth with harbors and access to sea traffic on both sides, the Aegean Sea on the east and the Ionian Sea on the west. It was a worldly city, a wealthy city, a self-sufficient city. It was valuable to whatever national power might be ruling the day.

In the months after Paul's initial visit, the Christian congregation in Corinth was beset with problems. Hence this letter by Paul. There were divisions and factions, desires for wisdom, desires for worldly power, lingering ties to morally loose Greek culture, and patterns of misunderstanding of God's saving truth—communion for example. In his letter, Paul emphasizes that their relationship with the Lord comes first. And this relationship does not have its origin in them or in their own will, wit, wisdom, wealth, or worldly power. It was God's doing. It was God's reaching out to them in mercy and love with faith in the forgiveness won through His crucified and risen Son.

Brethren, when I came to you, I did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. Paul clearly says, “I came to you.” They had not invited Paul, they had not sought out the message of mercy in Christ. God sent Paul there. The word “apostle” means “one sent out.” God's message had come to them by the Apostle Paul. It was God's doing.

Paul calls them “brethren” or brothers (certainly sisters as well). He was very close to them. He had brought them the Good News of Jesus. There is a close relationship between Christian and Christian. Sadly on this earth we struggle with visible churches that may intentionally or unintentionally maintain teachings, which disagree with Scripture. As a result there is separation in our togetherness. Yet in the Invisible Christian Church, the Holy Christians Church, we are brothers and sisters of the closest kind. Paul's word for brothers, “adelphoi” means “of the same womb.”

Paul reminds his brothers that they are Christians not because of the *excellence of speech or of wisdom*, with which he had come. *My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom.* Human wisdom has nothing to do with salvation, faith, forgiveness. Certainly human wisdom is a gift of God, but it can be mis-used to fool and deceive people. Learning and high learning are a gift of God. However, when learning and wisdom veer away from that which God says, or when they contradict what God says, then they are empty, worthless, and foolish. Examples: “The fool has said in his heart there is no God (Psalm 14:1)—yet some deny God. “In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth” (Exodus 20:11)—yet some say life self-generated. “The babe leaped in my womb for joy”! (Luke 1:44)—yet some say a babe in the womb is not a real person. “Men, leaving the

natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing that which is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due” (Romans 1:27)—yet some say homosexuality is not a sin. “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4)—yet some say sexual intimacy outside of marriage is not a sin. In fact, every sin involves the idea that “I know more than God.” Logic and reasoning are a gift of God, but sinful logic, false reasoning, and self-excusing rationalizing, although they seem ever so smart, are ever so wrong.

Your rescue from sin and eternal death is from the Lord. It is built on the Lord. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me” (John 14:6). In our text Paul says, *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.* Everything about salvation centers in Christ. That was Paul’s focus. The Bible, indeed all the Bible, centers in the message of Christ. Jesus Christ is our champion, He is our hero. He is the one God promised. We address Him as “Jesus” which means “Savior!” We address Him as “Christ” which means God’s appointed and “anointed” one, our King: our Prophet—spokesman from God; and our Priest and Sacrifice—He offered up Himself in payment for our disobedience. So Paul says, “I did, and I intended to, preach only Jesus Christ as the Savior.” Yet sinful human logic scoffs and says, “And He got crucified.” To the sinful human mind, a crucified Savior?! What kind of man allows Himself to be impaled on a pole until dead?—either a weakling or a fool. Not so. Jesus did so willingly in love, to pay the price for you. The sinful human mind says, Who in innocence would pay such a price to save a guilty culprit? A world of culprits? In love Jesus did. Paul preached only Christ crucified, because Christ is God’s wisdom and God’s power, which far surpasses our meager abilities. In Jesus alone, the Father extends and grants forgiveness to you. The older I get, the more I see how unworthy I have been, how unworthy I am. And the more I treasure Jesus. I pray that you do too. “God have mercy on me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). In Jesus He does. Christ crucified is real wisdom and strength for Lent.

Paul further says, *I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.* The preaching of salvation in Jesus is not a message based on earthly power. Paul did not preach with a big ego or with arrogant self-confidence. He did not preach himself, but Christ who died in outward shame. This is the same Christ who rose from death on the third day—unscathed! honored by the Father and then seated at the Father’s right hand. Jesus is indeed the victor and your victor. He will take you to heaven forgiven! His service on earth and in Lent looks like weakness—He surrendered Himself to His enemies to die—yet His power over Satan, over sin, over death and hell is your life!

Paul writes, *But my presence among you was in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,* Did Paul do special miracles at Corinth to demonstrate the power of God with him? Acts 18 tells us about Paul’s stay at Corinth. It lasted a year and a half. He preached Christ to the Jews and, when they rejected, to the Gentiles. There is no record of any “demonstrations of power,” no miraculous deeds, no healings, no driving out evil spirits. (Perhaps there were, but they were not recorded). Yet, while at Corinth, the Lord told him, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10). In Corinth there would be, and were, many converts! This alone was a *demonstration of the Spirit and of power.* To turn a heart glued to idol worship, or heathen philosophy, and to direct it to trust Jesus is indeed a miraculous work that the Lord worked in their hearts by the message of Paul preached. Think of a vicious dog that only obeys its master because the master carries a club. That same dog, taken by a new master who treats it with kindness and love, becomes willfully devoted to the new master and obeys from the heart. Amazing! In the case of unbelievers, the change is even more miraculous. Such a change has also been worked in you!

During Lent you are reminded that your own wisdom and your own power do not bring you into good standing with God. It is all about Jesus. Even though you are wiser in Christ now than you were before, even though you have more readily applied yourself in Christ and don’t offend God now like you did before (maybe when you were young and daring, or maybe a few weeks ago), do not think that your wisdom and your power have gotten you onto safe ground. Your forgiveness and your relationship with God comes from God and is due to God. The Lenten season points you to Christ crucified for you, and Christ risen on the third day for you. As Paul says in the previous chapter, “The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (I Corinthians 1:25). Likewise our text closes, *Your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God!*

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---