

1st Corinthians 1:10-18
Wise Words
WRCoB 4.28.24

An architect, designing a new church facility
Was told by its church members
That they didn't want a cross in the design

No cross on a steeple
No cross in front of the sanctuary

They told the architect
Nobody wants to see such a gloomy symbol any more.

It shows weakness not strength.
Failure not success
A bad ending to an otherwise nice story.

And when this church hired their new pastor
They asked him not to dwell on the cross
In his preaching.

It was a turn off to the progressives in the congregation..

Keep away from songs that center on the cross
And blood and that kind of stuff
They've moved on from that

Philip Rieff from the University of Chicago
Observes

*Any church or any preacher who keeps preaching on the
cross is not going to grow.*

I pray that he was just being facetious

Those little churches that preach Christ crucified
Will be surrounded by big booming churches that don't

The big churches promise you that if you give God a nickel
God will give you back a dime.

There are no crosses in these churches.

Reinhold Niebuhr once said during a lecture
At Union theological Seminary in NYC

*This is a view that insists on a God without wrath bringing
men and women without sin into a kingdom without
judgment through Christ without a cross.*

The far-left leaning churches look to the cross
As the ill-fated death of a radical revolutionary
And emphasize the words of Jesus.

The far-right leaning churches look to the cross
As the central reason for Christ's coming
And emphasize the words of Paul.

But let me say.

Whatever you feel about the crucifixion
Whether it's just an unfortunate death of a good man
Or God's plan for salvation.

The cross and the resurrection
Is what got the Christian movement rolling.

Without either, the Gospel would have died along with Jesus

Without the cross, Jesus is just nice story.

A story of a man who roamed the countryside of Galilee
Healing and ministering to the needs of the people

Preaching and teaching of the kingdom of God.

A caring and gentle man
A blessing to everyone he met
Even if he was a bit of a challenge
To the religious authorities.

A story about a man named Jesus sent by God
Divine like God
Who came to show us what God is like

We will know God by knowing Jesus.

This is God
Loving, caring, not judgmental, or harsh or demanding

A beautiful story thus far.

But hearing this story, as nice as it is
Doesn't go far in transforming people
Into Christlike individuals.

Some? Yes.

The vast majority will pay no further attention to it.

What's a nice guy that lived 2000 years ago
Have anything to do with me?

And at this point, somebody might ask
"So, what happened to this kind man?"

And then you share the story about Jesus' suffering
His trial and conviction

His torture, his grief
The abandonment of all his friends
Save for a few women

You share about his excruciating death on a cross.

Some will be drawn to the story.

Others may like the story of Jesus
But without the gruesome ending

Ok, so, we'll just leave that part of the story out.

Indeed, many do just that.

We just want to hear about Jesus being kind to everyone.

Preach that!

The story is not complete without the cross.

You can't go from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday
Without spending some time in Good Friday.

The Apostle Paul knew that
And wanted to make sure
The Corinthians knew that too.

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Our Scripture Lesson takes us
To the vibrant and bustling city of Corinth

A port city, across from Athens on the Aegean Sea.

Paul begins his letter as he does every letter
With proper Christian salutations.

But then, he immediately jumps into the fray.

There're major problems in the church.

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Now Corinth had a reputation as being a sinful city.

It you read 1st Corinthians
There're some pretty big issues.

- Sexual sins
- Spiritual superiority
- Suing one another in court
- And abusing Love Feast

Think about it.

Here we are, around 25 years after Jesus
A new church, zealous believers
Filled with the Holy Spirit

And really having some major issues.

Hence the reason for Paul's letters.

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Paul founded the Corinth church
On his second missionary journey

And he writes to Corinth from Ephesus
On his third trip out from Jerusalem.

His first issues deals with spiritual superiority.

He hears from Cloe's household
That some members follow Paul
And some follow Apollos
And still others follow Cephas

And Paul asks, "Is Christ divided?"
"Was I crucified for you?"

It appears this comes out of baptism.

Some bragged about who it was that baptized them.

And so, Paul writes, he's glad he didn't baptize anyone
Except for Crispus and Gaius.

And then he remembers he baptized Stephanus' household
Maybe others, he can't remember.

Anyway, he gets back on point

1 Corinthians 1:17 NIV

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Now here is something to ponder!

Paul wants to preach the gospel
Without wisdom and eloquence
Fearing the cross would be emptied of power!

So wise words and eloquent speech
Robs the cross of its power.

How's that work?

I mean, don't we love eloquent speakers
Who preach and pray with such beautiful words
With such style and cadence

Elaborately using the power of the spoken word.

Yes.

However, if the eloquent words
Shows off the preacher's abilities
But doesn't point us to Jesus
Then the cross loses its power.

Corinth was a city filled with philosophers
And orators and rhetoricians

And they loved to debate in the city square
And they loved to hear themselves talk.

And at the end of the day
Their words echo through the streets
Empty of any transformative power.

Paul would not be one of them.

He makes it a point later.

1 Corinthians 2:1 NIV

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

No, said Paul, I preached Christ crucified.

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There are preachers who avoid preaching the cross.

Rather, they emphasize the life and ministry of Jesus.

I tend to do that.

The life and ministry of Jesus is essential preaching
But not at the exclusion of the cross!

Hear the story of the Rev Charles Berry
As told by Gordon MacDonald.

In the late 1800s, Charles Berry, an English preacher, became the pastor of the great Plymouth Church in Brooklyn.

One day Berry described how earlier he had come to Jesus Christ. There had been a time in Berry's early ministry when he preached a very thin gospel—really no gospel at all. As did the Corinthians, he looked upon Jesus as merely a noble teacher but not as a divine redeemer.

Late one night during his first pastorate, as he sat in his cozy study, there came a knock. He opened the door and found a typical Lancashire girl with a shawl over her head and clogs on her feet.

"Are you a minister?" she asked. Getting an affirmative answer, she went on breathlessly. "You must come with me quickly. I want you to get my mother in."

Thinking it was a case of some drunken mother out in the streets, Berry said, "You must go and get a policeman." "No," said the girl, "My mother is dying, and you must come and get her into heaven."

Berry got dressed and followed her for a mile and a half through lonely streets in the night. He knelt at the woman's

side, and he began telling her how good and kind Jesus was and how he'd come to show us how to live.

Then the desperate woman cut him off. "Mister," she cried, "that's no use for the likes of me. I'm a sinner. I've lived my life. Can't you tell me of someone who can have mercy upon me and save my poor soul?"

"I stood there in the presence of a dying woman," said Berry, "and I realized I had nothing to tell her. In the midst of sin and death, I had no message.

In order to bring something to that dying woman, I leapt back to my mother's knee, to my cradle faith, and I told her the story of the Cross and of a Christ who is able to save to the uttermost."

The tears began to run down the woman's cheeks. "Now you're getting it," she said. "Now you're helping me." Berry concluded the story by saying, "I got her in, and blessed be God, I got in myself."

1 Corinthians 1:18 NRSV

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The Christian faith would not be where it is today
If not for the preachers who preached Christ
And Christ crucified.

Let us, who preach and teach and those who give testimony
Use eloquent and wise words
To enhance the cross of its saving power.

And let us all confess our need for Jesus

In every aspect of our life