

Michael J. Mathey
Epiphany V
February 8, 2026
Text: I Corinthians 2:1 – 16
Title: Not. No One. Nothing (based on a sermon from CPR)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. We all know what the big event is today, it's Super Bowl Sunday! To many people this day is about some people who are important, and about something that's significant. And I would guess that most of us would care more about it if our favorite team were a part of it. But today is Super Bowl LX. We've heard plenty about both teams this week, and there's been lots of hype about the New England Patriots returning to the big game. There have been plenty of words. There's been an over-abundance of "lofty speech" and "wisdom" from players and coaches, from experts and commentators, and of course from the fans. All of this has appeared in print and on TV and on countless sports talk shows and sports websites. But, in a week of media blitz, with thousands of reporters grabbing and grasping for any kind of story like what will happen during the half-time show, most of it has really been saying a lot about nothing. And in spite of all the predictions and commentary the game will settle it all in the end. Someone will probably do something spectacular, and something might happen to someone that's unexpected and either awesome or awful, like a record being set or an injury ending a career.

All of this week's hype and incessant talk is really the complete opposite of how St. Paul says that he is addressing the Church at Corinth in the second chapter of his first epistle. Paul says that he *didn't* come to them with lofty speech and wisdom. He *didn't*, in fact, have a lot to say—at least not about a lot of different things that they might have wanted to hear about, like the news from other places that he had been traveling to. But one thing is certain, Paul *did not* say a lot about nothing. What he had to say, was definitely something!

So here's what *is* before us in today's text: Paul's words are filled with a triple negation—he uses the words *not*, *no one*, and *nothing*—and in their use these words become wonderfully positive. In fact, from this Word of God we will discover and rejoice that “Nothing” Means Everything.

What do we *want* to see and hear? What do we *need* to see and hear? What do the redeemed people of God need to hear? What does the fallen world need to hear? These are important questions, and these are what Paul is addressing when he says to the Corinthians in our text: “I decided to know *nothing* among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (v 2).

The Gospel does *not* rest on and it is *not* revealed by the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. For Paul did *not* come proclaiming God's Word with lofty speech or wisdom. He reminds them of that fact with those very words in the first verse of the text, “I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.”

In fact, a bit later in the text Paul expands on this point when he paraphrases words from Isaiah 64:4, “...no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” He's basically saying to them, “Who would make up the message that I have presented to you? No one could have come up with this on their own!” Yet the Light of God in this Epiphany to us has revealed the promised Savior to a blinded world that was still trapped in the darkness since our fall into sin.

Our sinful nature often makes us more easily impressed by the human wisdom of the world than by the things of God. Science convinces us that we can be the masters of our own development and destiny, and so we have people out there using genetics to create human embryos from three parents or crossing human DNA with animals. Society has decided that two

people of the same gender should be able to marry one another because all you need is love to make a family, and so there are other people pushing the discussion to say if love is the only foundation that's needed then why can't three or more people be married together? How can we discriminate against them? And human wisdom looks at the gifts of God that come from the preaching of His Word and through His Sacraments and it says that those things are outdated, foolish, weak, and even hateful and bigoted. What do we need them for?

It is "*not* a wisdom of this age" through which the Gospel is learned. Human wisdom can only get us so far in this world. But it is only when God works his revelation through His Son that we can truly learn His Gospel. In verse 12 we read that "we have received *not* the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given to us by God." Indeed, Paul's speech and message to the Corinthians, "were *not* in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...the power of God."

Because as we read in the Small Catechism the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church," so Paul writes in verse 11 that "*no one* comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."

"*None* of the rulers of this age understood" God's "secret and hidden wisdom" (vv 8, 7), and, in ignorance, they crucified the Lord of glory. They did not—they could not—understand that God's wisdom was greater and that it had been in place "before the ages" (v 7). They did not understand—and, without the Spirit's work, neither do we—what God prepared and what the Spirit alone had made known. Truly, *no one* can grasp God's eternal plan, from first promise to final fulfillment and future glory. *No one* can grasp how God thinks and, so, how He acts—that He acts not in judgment and condemnation, but in mercy and grace, in kindness and love. *No*

one can discover the Good News of salvation on their own. We try to figure God out, we try everything that we can think of, but we fail.

Our struggles to do things on our own can and should turn us from our attempts at gaining our own spiritual knowledge and insight to looking at the Word of God alone. But we continue to look up or to look inside for our answers rather than to look down at the written and revealed Scriptures that come from God.

Indeed, we really know nothing! In the 1840s, there was a strong anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiment that arose among certain native-born Protestant Americans who saw foreigners and Catholics as a threat to their economic and political security, sounds familiar doesn't it? So, in 1849, the secret *Order of the Star-Spangled Banner* was formed in New York City. Soon after, similar lodges formed in many other American cities. Members, when asked about their exclusionary organization, were supposed to say they knew nothing, and that's why they came to be known as the "Know-Nothing Party."

The movement grew, so that in the 1850s the group shed its secretive nature and became the *American Party*. Their stands included restrictions on immigration, the exclusion of the foreign-born from voting or holding public office, and a twenty-one-year residency requirement for US citizenship. When Congress assembled on December 3, 1855, forty-three representatives were members of the *Know-Nothing Party*. A later group in California in the 1880s called for the exclusion of Chinese and other Asians from industrial employment.

Paul's words to the Corinthians are even stronger than these claims of this long-forgotten American political movement. He states what was always true for him—and what is always true for the Church and her pastors: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

But this text reveals the heart of Paul's missionary efforts. More than that, it reveals the living heart of the Church, of the Church's life and identity, and of the Church's mission and proclamation: "For I decided to know *nothing* among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (v 2). This is the truth. This is the message. This is the task. This wasn't just for Paul to get right as he wrote to the Corinthian Christians. This is for the Church of all times and all places to get right!

This is not simply repeating the Reformation motto "sola Christus" (Christ alone). And this is not just talking about Jesus a great deal—which, we pray, most preachers and churches do without fail. Yes, you and I must talk about Jesus Sunday after Sunday, but Paul doesn't tell us to do this just any old way. Instead he says, "I decided to know *nothing* among you except Jesus Christ *and him crucified.*" For the cross of Christ must be at the center of our proclamation, because this is how Jesus Christ is known to us. And nothing else matters because if it does then our sin still matters, and our guilt still matters, and our shame still matters, and our separation from the holy God still matters, and our eternal damnation still matters. But because of Jesus' cross, because of His death, as both our substitute and our sacrifice, now forgiveness matters. Redemption matters. Freedom matters. And our Restoration to God matters.

The commercials before, during, and after today's Super Bowl want you to notice and to know about a lot of things. Advertisers are betting millions on it! But the contrast to all of that hype today is this: the cross alone—just this one message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified—is the never-ending truth that the Church proclaims, that the Christian upholds, and that the Holy Spirit uses to redeem and to rescue and to restore all of us sinners. With Paul *we* say: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.