

Third Sunday after Epiphany
January 22, 2023

“The Power of God through the Cross of Jesus to us!” (1 Corinthians 1:17-18)

By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 3rd Sunday after Epiphany is from our Epistle reading 1 Corinthians 1:17-18.

“17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Here ends our text.

The last verse of our epistle today, verse 18, which I just read is repeated as the first verse of next week’s epistle. For this verse emphasizes the very foundation of Christianity – the message and power of the cross. Paul calls the message the logos, the word. The message of the gospel is the message of the cross. For the Word Jesus Himself, the Logos made flesh, was crucified for the sins of the world. Any other message that man invents as the message of the cross, as clever or as wise as it may seem, makes the cross of Christ of no effect – null and void.

But when the message of the cross, which seems like foolishness to the wise is received by faith, it has the opposite effect. The cross is the saving power of God! Literally, it’s the dynamite power of God! That’s where we get the word dynamite from, dynamus, or “power” in the Greek.

First, we look at how the message of the cross can be twisted so that it has no effect. And second, we look at the beautiful, glorious saving message of the true preaching of the cross.

In the Corinthian congregation, they had to be on guard against the Greek cultural influences in which they were living. There were political parties in Corinth and also the Corinthians admired the Greek philosophers. There are differences of opinion and philosophies on how best to govern. And there is nothing wrong with that. But if political parties and human philosophies become the message of the

Christian church, then there is a big problem. And that was what was happening in Corinth. There were divisions within the church according to who wanted to follow which leader. Apollos was a gifted orator, eloquent and a bold speaker. Acts 18 tells us that

“he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.”

That was a good thing. We want bold speakers of Christ. Two doctrinally sound Christians Aquila and Priscilla recognized this, but wanted to help him make sure that what he was saying was accurate.

“When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”

So Apollos was well received in Corinth, but some also began to idolize him. Paul says,

“there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

It’s not about the man, unless it’s about the God-Man Jesus Christ and His message of salvation. To make his point, Paul asks them if he was crucified for them. Or were they baptized in his name. Of course, there would be no comfort for us today if our message was Paul crucified or Apollos crucified. They were sinful men just like you and me and there would be no benefit to you or me in their death.

No, the message is all about Jesus. And there can be no divisions in His church. There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. (Ephesians 4:5)

It’s not about the person who is doing the baptism, but about the power of baptism being connected to the person of Jesus Christ. For what Jesus did on the cross is given in baptism – His victory over death and His resurrection is united to the baptized believer.

Paul goes on to say that he hardly did any baptisms. Certainly not enough to form a political party, just a few people and their families. Jesus Himself didn’t baptize but this work was given to His disciples, the church. Again, Paul dedicated himself to the preaching of the gospel and let the administration of the sacrament, which can be done by any Christian, left to other leaders in the church.

Our sinfulness, wants to elevate the baptizer instead of the baptism itself. John the Baptist knew that Jesus must increase and he decrease. His disciples had become jealous that Jesus was baptizing more (John 4) although it was not Jesus who did the actual baptizing.

Even if a person is baptized by an unbeliever, it is still a valid baptism because the power of the baptism comes from the word not the person.

And that is what Paul wanted the Corinthians and each of us to remember. The power of God, the dynamite, is in His Word. Now, God is of course, omnipotent and all powerful. He created all things and sustains all things. He gives life and takes life. Yet, the power of God which Paul speaks of here is power that is the power of grace, love and mercy.

And this is foolishness to the Greeks and to the world. For the power of grace and mercy manifests itself in the death of Jesus. That doesn't seem powerful, does it. Here in our Gospel reading we see Jesus performing all types of miracles healing diseases, driving out demons and making paralytics walk. Now that's power that we can identify with. Our sinful world, idolizes power. Political parties will do just about anything to keep power. People love to have power over another. And it gave the Pharisees and ruling leaders of the church much joy to see Jesus powerless on the cross. "You saved others, and you can't save yourself?".

But as we continue reading in 1 Corinthians Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14. **"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."**

And yet, Isaiah also prophesies of the recovery of true wisdom in the verses that follow.

**"Is it not yet a very little while
Till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
And the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest?
18 In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book,
And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.
19 The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord,
And the poor among men shall rejoice
In the Holy One of Israel."**

The humble who see their powerlessness before God because of their sin, will rejoice in the words of the book – the Good news of the Gospel.

And that is what Jesus preached as He healed.

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.”

Christ’s kingdom comes not in awful power of might but in the merciful power of His love through the kingdom of grace.

So Paul concludes:

“22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

Christ, the power of God, the dynamite of salvation, came in weakness and foolishness of the cross to save us. Christ crucified! This is our great joy for Christ crucified is where my sins are crucified and your sins are crucified. And we receive this beautiful gift of forgiveness through baptism into Christ! Baptism saves! Simple water and His power word! It’s foolishness to the unbelieving, perishing world, but salvation to all who believe!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, in Him alone, baptism in Him alone is your power to defy death, the devil and sin! For Christ has done it for you and gives you all these blessings through faith. This is your gospel dynamite through Christ!

And this simple message of Christ crucified is what unites His church and brings to an end all divisions and disunity. And it spurs you and I, God’s people to preach and proclaim this message so that others would become wise for salvation.

2 Timothy 3:15

and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

For the spoken word is powerful and will not return null or void.

Isaiah 55:11

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

In the men's Bible study on Thursday, and the women will hear this story too on this Thursday in their Bible study, God called a young Jewish boy in the late 40's in New Orleans to understand that death is not the end. His Rabbis told him that his beloved uncle who had just died is no longer. He shouldn't expect to see him ever again - the doctrine of the Saducees that there is no resurrection. Dead is dead. And young Eddie Balfore didn't like that answer. He knew from his study of the Old Testament that God must have a different answer.

So, he started visiting local Christian churches – just sat in the back pew for a couple of years. And the Word of God, the power of the Gospel changed his heart. He took comfort in the cross, Christ crucified, for which the young boys at his school had blamed him. Christ killer! Christ killer! And Eddied bought a crucifix, brought it home and was thoroughly beat up by his brother who still doesn't talk to him. To some the message of the cross is foolishness, to those who are perishing.

But to Eddies mother it was wisdom. Eddie became a pastor in the LCMS and baptized his mother at the age of 94. Didn't baptize her in the name of Paul or Apollos or Peter, but in name of the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The name by which you were baptized into the one holy Christian apostolic church for both the Jews and the Gentiles. All glory to God! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)