

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Epiphany 5 – February 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### **1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (NIV – 1984)**

**“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”**

Dear Friends in Christ,

There are times in life when we think a simple task is much more complicated than it actually is. For example, if you have ever played basketball, you know that one of the simpler shots is the free-throw. You are only 15 feet away with no one guarding you – just put it in the basket. The problem is that we take this simple act and make it way too complicated. We think too much about our feet and where they should be and how far apart they should be. We think about where to focus our eyes – the front of the rim or the back of the rim. Some players are trying to decide whether to jump when they shoot it or keep their feet flat on the ground. We think about how many times to dribble the ball before we shoot it. We try to think too much and things get too complicated and I think we all know what happens when we take this simple act and make it too complicated. More often than not, our free throw percentage begins to get worse rather than better. At such times like that, we easily forget that less is more and simple is all that’s necessary.

The same thoughts apply, when you and I are encouraged to share our Savior with someone we know and love, because sometimes we forget that simple is all that’s necessary. So often when it comes to personally sharing the Savior, we end up getting too worried about the details. We think we need the perfect set-up, the perfect conversation, the perfect presentation of Law and Gospel. So we get so worried that we’re going to say something wrong, that we’ll stumble in our words, that what we have to say won’t be effective, or that we’ll be rejected. Rather than simply share what you know about Jesus and what that means for you as a blood-bought child of God, you get so nervous or so worried about sharing the Savior that you end up thinking, “I could never do that.”

Today the apostle Paul reminds us that when it comes to proclaiming Christ, simple is all that’s necessary. After all, God does command his church—you and me—to **“go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19)**, and to **“preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15)**, but God doesn’t command us to be eloquent. No, God says:

#### **Theme: Humbly Proclaim Jesus!**

- 1. God’s Word has the power to save**
- 2. We are just God’s messengers**

When Paul first arrived in the Greek city of Corinth, he didn’t know what to expect. He had just come from Athens, where he had been largely rejected. Would it be the same here? Would the Corinthians reject his message of Christ crucified as “foolishness”? You see, Corinth was a city where the people prized eloquence and human wisdom. They wanted impressive speakers and presentations. They wanted a wise message.

Corinth was also a city that would’ve made Las Vegas blush with their rampant sexually immoral practices. So how effective could this traveling preacher really be when people didn’t want to give up satisfying their fleshly lusts? Paul entered Corinth armed only with the Word. **“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him**

**crucified.”** Paul proclaimed what he knew about his Savior in a simple way. Oh, he was capable of eloquence. He was a well-educated man, but that’s not what these people needed. They needed the simple message of Christ crucified, a message Paul described earlier, **“Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”**(1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

The message that Paul proclaimed was a humble message, a message considered foolish by those who thought they were “wise”. The idea of a Savior who died a slave’s death was ridiculous. It was a message considered weak by those looking for a powerful Savior. The idea of a Savior who died a criminal’s death was offensive. Yes, it was a humble message about a humble Savior, but the wisdom of Christ crucified is in its simplicity.

You see, Jesus is like no other savior or god in human history. He came to save even us—poor, sinful human beings who have clearly and willingly rebelled against God’s holy will, who deserve nothing, but eternal death in hell. Still he came to save us. Still out of amazing love for us, Jesus left his heavenly throne to become a baby like you and me, to grow up and live a perfect life. He allowed his enemies to harass and beat him, to pound nails into his hands and feet, and hang him on a cross. He suffered the pains of hell all of us deserve. He willingly sacrificed himself on that cross to forgive us and bring us eternal life. Jesus, then, sealed his victory on the third day, when he left the tomb empty as our risen Savior. He forgave all our sins and made us alive through faith.

The humble Savior gives power to that humble message, as Paul told the Corinthians, **“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”** Through that simple message of Christ crucified, the Holy Spirit breaks through dead hearts and creates faith as with the Corinthians, faith which comes not from **“men’s wisdom, but...God’s power”**.

Sometimes you and I are tempted to lose sight of how powerful that humble message of Christ crucified really is. We think that our fumbling and stumbling will make it less effective. We think that we have to do more to impress those who are either unbelievers or unchurched. We think that we have to make a power-packed presentation with Bible passages perfectly quoted. Then, and only then, will our message be effective, but doing that only ends up missing the cross. It ends up making the message about us.

No, that humble message is a powerful message that has made us wise for salvation. Paul wrote, **“From infancy, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”** (2 Timothy 3:15) That message is like dynamite that blast through stony hearts like ours to create life where there was death, forgiveness and peace where there was guilt and turmoil. Like Paul, we can be absolutely confident in the power of that humble message of Christ crucified. **“I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...”** (Romans 1:16) What else do we need to proclaim Christ?

We have a great message to share, that gives every one of us reason for confidence, but what about actually opening my mouth and sharing it? Here is where you and I forget that less is more. We fool ourselves into thinking that the situation, the set-up, or the proclaiming has to be perfect. Besides who can remember all those passages? Trust me, you’re not the first, nor will you be the last to have such concerns. Paul had similar concerns. **“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.”** Paul’s nerves attacked him too, but that didn’t stop him from simply sharing what he knew. Yes, it was humbly proclaimed, but powerfully effective. The Holy Spirit worked through Paul’s words to make those dead Corinthian alive.

It’s no different for you and me. I think sometimes we get so worried about what we’re going to say, how we’re going to say it, and what reaction we’re going to get that we freeze in fear. It happens to all of us. After all, it’s much easier to say nothing than to open our lips and speak, but such fear only forgets God’s promises. It’s much easier to assume someone else is going to do the work of sharing the Gospel with people, but that’s not what our God has called you and me to do. It’s easier to expect people to come to us, since they

know where our church is, than to do the work of going to them as our God has commanded, but woe to those who sit back and do nothing.

No, we have a message that needs to be shared. If you think to yourself, “I could never do that,” take a cue from one of our little ones. How is it that a preschooler in his or her own simple way can readily and more clearly say more about what they believe about Jesus than adults who have been lifelong Christians? The little one has learned about a Savior who loved her so much that he died and rose for her, and she wants to tell people about her Jesus. It doesn’t take rocket science or a PowerPoint presentation to simply tell someone you know and love, “Jesus is my Savior and this is why it matters for me.”

You are a redeemed, restored, forgiven child of God. Christ lived and died and rose again for you. He even forgives you for the times when you have been too fearful or too lazy to share the Gospel. You know that because of Christ you’re going to see him in heaven someday. Isn’t that something you would want to share with the people who matter to you most? If you’re nervous about sharing that, don’t forget even the humblest proclamation of Christ crucified is powerfully effective.

Paul reminded his readers, **“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”** The Holy Spirit always works through fumbling, stumbling lips. It’s not our place to make the Word more effective. We let the Lord do the work through his Word.

At the same time, we have two important promises. Jesus made a promise to his disciples for those times when they would be under great pressure about testifying to the truth. **“Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”** (Mark 13:11) Though you may not face arrest or trial for your faith, the promise holds true for you. You simply share what you know about the Savior and the Holy Spirit will use the words you speak.

There’s also one more promise that is absolutely comforting. After commanding his Church to go and make disciples, Jesus promised, **“Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”** (Matthew 28:20) As you humbly proclaim Christ, you have no reason to fear. Christ is with you. We have work to do, but it’s not as complicated as you might think. The Lord has given us the gift of Christ crucified to enjoy and share. That’s what God wants in his church—not a group of people sitting on their hands and hoping guests will show up, but a forgiven people humbly proclaiming Christ in their own unique ways, yet ever confident in the God who gives power to that Word. Let him do the work. May God bless you as you take that wonderful message to the people you know and love. Amen