Communion Message
August 24, 2014

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

The Scandalous Cross

Intro:

ILL - Mapplethorpe-seaside community in East Lindsey district of Lincolnshire, England

✓ Patricia Gearing’s young daughter died of Batten’s disease in 1998 (neurological)
✓ Grave marked by a cross in a small cemetery - Local authorities demanded its removal stating, “Crosses are discouraged, as excessive use of the supreme Christian symbol is undesirable.”
✓ Family given permission to replace the cross with a Mickey Mouse headstone

A. The scandal of the cross continues-from Paul's day to our own-always a cause for offense
B. People respond to its offense differently
   1. Some ridicule it
   2. Some try to ignore it
   3. Christians even try to reduce its shame
C. Our long familiarity with the cross has made it an item of beauty rather than a symbol of repugnant absurdity.

1. More used to the highly polished brass adornment or an object of art in our buildings and homes than the instrument of torture and device used for the execution of the death penalty.
2. Have even grown sadly familiar with the Christian story

Morna Hooker “We are too used to the Christian story, it is difficult to grasp the absurdity, indeed the sheer madness of this Gospel which was proclaimed by the first Christians in a world where the cross was the most barbaric form of punishment man could devise.”
3. BUT…there was no such illusion with the people in Corinth to whom Paul addressed his letter.

I. The Folly of the Cross

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. (1 Cor. 1:22-25)

Note: The cross was the sum and substance of Paul’s teaching (2:2 determined to know nothing except JD and Him crucified) but he realized immediately how stupid this message was to the Corinthians. No one could conceive of God as revealing himself by dying on a cross.

Actually: This is all the more reason to believe in the Gospel message because no one would devise such a silly plan.
A. A Scandal to the Jews—sought after a sign
   1. Looking for something big to be done by their Messiah (always asked Jesus to do a sign)
   2. Thought if God was going to visit the world in human flesh and bring salvation—it would be in power
   3. The cross was a million miles away from their expectation…spoke of weakness—not power, defeat—not victory, and humiliation—not conquest.
   4. Only failed Messiahs would end up on a cross—NT Wright…”whoever heard of a crucified Messiah? Crucifixion is what Roman soldiers would do the poor deluded fanatics who think they are God’s chosen hero and find out too late, they are not after all.”
   5. Deuteronomy 21:23…”cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.”
   6. To the Jews the cross was a scandal!

B. An embarrassment to the Romans
   1. Persians invented it but Romans perfected it
   2. Used it to crush the will of any who dared cross the authority of the emperor
   3. Reserved only for the lower class…polite Roman culture would not even speak of crucifixion….beneath their dignity
   4. Combined pain with humiliation to maximize the effect (parade them through town carrying the crossbeam to humiliate and shame them)
   5. Roman citizens were not crucified
   6. The powerful gods and leaders of Rome would die heroic deaths but never the death of the cross…an embarrassment

C. An absurdity to the Greeks
   1. God was found through argument, through the highest forms of reason
   2. The greater the intellect the greater one would be able to have a chance at knowing God.
   3. The Jews reserved judgment on the Messiah until he met their criteria of power…the Greeks the criteria of wisdom
   4. By their standards the message of the cross was extremely foolish
   5. The notion that God would manifest himself in human flesh and claim to save the world in such a savage and naïve way was clearly nonsense.
   6. How could one accept as Lord and Savior someone not wise enough to save himself from the most embarrassing and humiliating of deaths…the cross

The Cross was sheer folly!

II. The Reality of the Cross

A. In reality it manifested both POWER and WISDOM

“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. (1 Cor. 1:24-25)

1. This scandal was the greatest good news the Jews could ever hear
2. The embarrassment unveiled the majesty of God
3. The foolishness was the greatest wisdom the Greeks could ever encounter
4. When all the systems of religion and thought failed to relate people to God, “it pleased God through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”
B. In the cross, God was outsmarting the world and accomplishing something to our advantage by overpowering our enemies and releasing us from their grip
   1. His power may have appeared as weakness
   2. His shrewd wisdom may have seemed foolish
   3. But his plan was deliberate
      a. He surrenders himself to folly and weakness
      b. In so doing establishes his real wisdom and demonstrates his mighty authority and power
      c. Reveals the power to deal with sin and restore people to a right relationship with God…the power to transform and make new!

   *John Stott:* There is wonderful power in the Cross of Christ. It has power to wake the dullest conscience and melt the hardest heart, to cleanse the unclean, to reconcile him who is afar off and restore him to fellowship with God, to redeem the prisoner from his bondage and lift the pauper from the dunghill, to break down the barriers which divide people from one another, to transform our wayward characters into the image of Christ and finally make us fit to stand in white robes before the throne of God.

C. The resurrection of Christ is the resounding declaration that the cross indeed was effective.
   1. If Jesus was rally cursed on the tree as the Jews supposed
   2. Had he really been extremely foolish as the Greeks claimed and unable to save himself from death
   3. Then he would certainly not have been raised from the dead three days later
   4. The resurrection reveals that though he bore a curse that it was not on his account but ours and that his death was accepted by God as adequate price for the penalty and so he was resurrected in power
   5. Now…no power can hold him—Even reduced to servant weakness…Satan could not hold Jesus in the tomb
   6. What the intellects then (and today) write off as absurd folly and extreme weakness was in reality a demonstration of both the greatest power and the most perfect wisdom!

III. The impact of the Cross

   *Note:* The impact of the cross is multi-dimensional (saves some but also has other far reaching implications)

A. The cross creates division
   1. Polarities were common (Jews/Greeks-Romans/Barbarians-Slave/free)
   2. Here another…those who are perishing….those who are being saved
   3. The most significant division of all…effects eternal destiny
   4. The dividing line between humanity is the cross
   5. Not only ages but eternities are established by the dividing line of the cross
   6. Those who write off the cross and its power are perishing
   7. Those who embrace it are being saved

   *ILL:* We live in a world of tolerance and friendship evangelism but not forget that the cross still divides. It will be an offense to some and we must accept that.
B. The cross unmasks folly

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:20,21)

1. Teachers of the law/Greek philosophers had promised show people how to know God had not succeeded...where are they now that Christ is Risen?
   a. There logic did not stand up
   b. No one found God through them
   c. They were still searching and looking (people today)
   d. Only in the cross has God chosen to reveal Himself

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, (1 Cor. 1:27,28)

2. The cross not only unmasked the emptiness of the world’s ways but it judged them
   a. Exposed their weakness and judged their pride
   b. Still does the same to the wisdom and power of this world
   c. The cross cries out like the little boy in the crowd…”the emperor has no clothes”
   d. The cross says that education, fame, fortune, pleasure will never satisfy…only the cross of Jesus Christ
   e. The cross says that humility not pride is the way of success, that transformation not therapy is the way of peace that trust not accumulation is the way of prosperity, that forgiveness not revenge is the way to fullness and joy, that love not pride is the only way to lasting assurance.

C. The cross produces humility (creates division with the world, unmasks the folly of unbelievers, but produces humility with followers of Christ)

“...that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:29)

1. The ground is indeed level at the cross
2. We can’t find God or satisfy his righteousness on our own
3. Nothing in my hands I bring...simply to thy cross I cling

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

Boast (kauchaomai)-Cow-bow'-mi-to boast, glory, revel, trust in, rejoice in, love for. The cross fills our horizons, engrosses our attention, and absorbs our time and energy.” (Stott)

IV. The achievement of the Cross

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Cor. 1:30)

Note: In contrast to the world’s wisdom...Christ has become for us the wisdom of God
A. **Our righteousness (from the law courts)**-right standing before God and right relationship with Him

B. **Our holiness (the temple)**-set apart for Him and solely owned by Him

C. **Our redemption (from the market place)**-set free from the power, and consequences of sin

**Note:** Redemption has made possible right relationship (righteousness) and right living (holiness)-ALL through the cross of Christ!

### V. The community of the Cross

**Note:** Paul had a reason to reflect on the cross. Not to comment on the state of the society or even preach the Gospel. It was to instruct the church in regard to who they were, their true identity. Yes, through the cross God saves individuals but it is also the means by which the new community was formed, is marked, and commissioned. The cross is the central aspect of the church!

#### A. The community is formed by the cross

1. A few people of means in Corinth (Gaius, Stephannus, Crispus, Erastus)
2. Most were slaves, insignificant by the world’s eyes
3. But all through the cross of Jesus
4. The community modeled the message (not many wise, wealthy, strong)

#### B. The community is marked by the cross

1. When Corinthians argued about the greatest or boasted of their significance or gifts, when they sued one another or left the “have nots” out of the fellowship, they were not living in accordance with the cross.
2. Don’t you know that you are the temple of God, the new community marked by the cross in a godless world

#### C. The community that proclaims the cross

**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.** 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

1. The proclamation is not philosophical rhetoric
2. Not flashy eloquence
3. His preaching was not sloppy or lacking excellence but the messenger could not upstage the message
4. We think that Christian athletes or superstars who have been converted are the best proclaimers of the message…we love to impress
5. The Christ who was crucified in humility and weakness must not be proclaimed with arrogance or pride!

**Conclusion:** September 12, 1994-small bi-plane crashed into the garden of Clinton’s White House
✓ Piloted by an escaped psychiatric patient, damage to the Clinton bedroom and havoc to the security machine
✓ Eluded the most sophisticated systems of wisdom and protection and power (man who was to the world, a castaway)
✓ Cross…to many weak and foolish is both powerful and wise.
✓ Sometimes weakness masks real strengths and folly hides genuine wisdom
✓ Also, the strength and wisdom of the world are easily fooled and defeated
✓ They certainly were in the cross of Christ