

1 Corinthians 1:8-25

Robert Barnes, Pastor of Evergreen Community Church

⁸For 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. ¹⁹For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”^[c]

²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²**Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,** ²³**but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,** ²⁴**but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

As you think about the job description of a pastor, it can have any number of items on it. There are some administrative tasks. Pastors have areas where they provide leadership. Training. Some keep office hours. But the main thing pastors do in churches is preach the Word. God calls all elders to be ready and able to teach, to be able to encourage and rebuke and inform with the truths of the Bible.

My denomination officially refers to me as a “teaching elder” but in light of today’s passage I think I’d prefer “preaching elder” because that puts the emphasis where Paul does today.

This week will be an Inception sort of sermon where I preach about preaching on preaching, drawing it from Paul’s teaching here as he connects it to finding the crucified Christ and the crucified Christ to the wisdom of the Bible. The text today is a chain of ideas that ends in Jesus—Jews know the truth, but in their arrogance, demand powerful signs, “dunamis”—where we get our word for dynamite—before they will believe. Greeks don’t have the truth because they don’t have the Law of God, but they worship the truth.

As Jaroslav Pelikan says, "They reject the truth of Christ because they have made a Christ of truth." In their arrogance, when they find the truth, they pretend like it's not true and go on living their lives how they want.

Paul says in the text today that both groups, who are people like you and me by the way, both groups get the rebuke and the refreshing they seek in Jesus Christ, crucified for sinners. They see the indescribable WOW of God raising Jesus from the dead to satisfy the Jewish need for certitude and the truth about Jesus' identity and promises that is the key to understanding who they are, what being and existence is, and who God is—both groups can get what they long for as they are satisfied in Christ and him crucified for sinners.

Today we focus on the topic of preaching and the most magnificent object of that preaching possible, Jesus Christ.

But what is preaching? It involves some transfer of information, it involves teaching doctrine, encouraging you, rebuking you, and doing all that from the firm foundation of the inerrant Word of God.

But preaching is when I encourage you to find your place in Christ's story and make a decision about what comes next in your life.

The gospel is a story. It's a story about Jesus and the prophecies about him. About his birth and perfect life. About his victory over Satan and the World. About his suffering sacrifice for us and all creation so that what was cursed in the Garden can be blessed again. So that what was lost can be found. So that enemies of God can become friends and family. His resurrection and ascension and glorification where he's currently praying for you and me. Especially me because this is hard, folks. In preaching the gospel, if I'm preaching myself instead of Christ, I'm doing it wrong, amen? But the gospel is a story and I am a part of that story.

Gospel preaching is telling that story to people and showing how they play a part in it now and forever. I mean that if I'm preaching on Jesus' birth, it's my job to make sure you understand where you are in the story. Are you humble Mary, or curious Magi? Are you baffled Joseph or evil Herod who can't stand the idea of a baby king challenging his authority? And once we

find who we are in these stories then the Scriptures begin to speak more directly to us.

This is all over the Old Testament. But just look at Jesus for a moment. Jesus asks over 300 questions in the NT and in them, he forces mankind to immediately access their relationship with him. "Who do you say that I am?" "Why are you anxious about your clothes?" "Why are you afraid?" "Who is my brother? Who is my mother?" All of these call people to evaluate their mind, emotions, values, theology, in light of their current relationship/status with Jesus. It's Peter's own sermon in Acts 2 where when he preaches to the crowd and as he preaches, tells them that they crucified Jesus. He may have meant that literally in some cases. But he also was doing exactly what I'm talking about—helping them find their place in the story of God. Helping them find their place in the gospel narrative. Helping them see who they are so they can see what they can become—by faith alone.

Teaching starts anywhere from Scripture, with any topic, and helps us to understand it and how it applies to today. And it's good. But preaching places us in a story, the One True Story that all adventures flow from where we can remain observers for a while, but the twist comes. Your sins killed Jesus, our sins were laid on him, and every bit of emotional and physical suffering he experienced, it was our fault. And it's that part of the story that you and I are no longer impartial observers, being taught. We are now the accused before the throne of God the judge of the universe. But shockingly at that point of our crime, Jesus rose from the grave and offered forgiveness to all us sinners, all us murderers, if we would surrender to him and call on his name and no other for our salvation.

That's preaching—me helping you find your place in that story and helping you respond with repentant faith.

Before the judgment seat of God where you and I are guilty, guilty, guilty, we are either Pilate or Pilate's wife. We are either the thief on the left, or on the right. We are the Roman Centurion with much faith or the rich young ruler. We are Peter or we are...well Peter. Thank God he finally made up his mind.

As Paul starts off his letter to a church with a few rough edges, a church with problems with body life, sacraments, moral scandal, by pointing them to Jesus and showing them how he is everything the Jewish and Greek world is longing for, just bigger. He's not just powerful and wise, but he's the "power and wisdom of God." That's a game-changer.

It means that Jesus isn't just someone that impresses us with his power and wisdom and then we applaud him and go on with our lives. He isn't someone who does his Jesus-thing and it impacts us personally, but then we get to decide how to work that out. Jesus isn't a dream we get to interpret on our own terms. If he's the power and wisdom of God, then he determines truth and response. Put another way, obedience to Jesus means surrendering our own interpretation of life. It means despairing of our own capabilities to define and respond to truth. It means despairing of our way of life in a radical way such that we abandon it and run to Jesus.

Some people, when they think about Jesus saving them, they talk about Jesus being at our door, knocking, asking for us to come out and let him save us. Jack Miller says no, it's more like we are in our house living life as we please and Jesus sneaks into the basement with some oily rags and matches and starts a blazing fire. And we run around trying to put it out ourselves for a while, googling up "12 tricks firefighters don't want you to know" until finally we give up and run out the door, abandoning our home. And there's Jesus, who has snuck out of the basement, around to the front door, and he catches us in his arms and embraces us and rescues us.

If Jesus is the power and wisdom of God, then it makes sense that surrender to him means surrendering our power, our smarts, our IQ, our plans, and submitting it all to him and really really meaning it. Jesus you can take my life and do whatever you want, and that includes killing my idols of consumerism where I just eat eat eat at the American Dream Buffet. Instead of worshiping freedom, I'll bind myself to you today.

Why is it that we read that Jesus is the power of God and yet we don't expect him to change anything? Why is it that we believe Jesus is the wisdom of God, the ultimate in mystical authoritative knowledge, and yet imagine that we can be a Christian and not have mind that's changed and being changed more and more? How can Jesus be the dunamis of God, the

dynamite of God, and not blow anything up, not shake things up, not scare the pants off of us sometimes?

So where are you today? In the text today the Greeks prized truth and sought it, and the Jews prized truth and possessed it. But stood guilty before God because both groups refused to admit that their search and application of truth ends in Jesus Christ. Both groups had turned truth into their Christ so that when Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes unto the Father except by me" they said, no thanks.

Our culture today has, again quoting Fools for Christ, by Jarislov Pelikan, wrestled truth from the Creator's hands and melted it down into a golden calf for them and their children to worship. Today, a wrathful God announces that he will burn that calf into ashes and make our culture drink it. Because our culture, more than any generation before it, has the truth (hold up cell phone) but we do almost nothing with it except amuse ourselves to death. The Bible says repeatedly that for people like our neighbors, it would be better for them to live in ignorance than have knowledge and refuse to let it lead us to obedience and trust and joy in the risen Christ.

Homeschoolers, Reformed theology experts, book readers, Bible-studiers, Master's Degree holders, missionaries and moms, knowledge of the truth is a good thing. But like Isaac, it too must be laid on the altar to be sacrificed. Otherwise, it will be an idol and a false Christ and there is only one Jesus, who is the power and wisdom of God. And he's in your basement this morning, and he's setting fire to a laundry basket full of oily rags right now. What's next for you and your family? I don't know. But I know that Jesus loves you and is waiting outside the front door. Let us pray.