**Epiphany 4 23 1 Cor1 Message of the Cross**

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The sermon is titled “**The Message of the Cross**” Our text is verse 18 from the epistle lesson. Let’s look at it again.

**I Corinthians 1: 18** 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.

There are 2 concepts in this passage that I want to examine today. A lot of what I have to say is found in the 2 booklets I wrote before I started the ordination courses. This is actually more of a bible study than a sermon. We will be looking at many scripture verses.

The first concept is “the message of the cross is foolishness for those who are perishing.” …. Have you ever had someone close to you that is not saved and that you have had the opportunity to witness your faith over and over, and encourage them to come to church many times, but they just do not get it. What seems plain and obvious to you just never seems to be communicated to them. You are concerned about their eternal destiny. You are anxious for them to see the consequences of not having a saving relationship with Jesus. However they respond with apathy or respond negatively. They just do not get it. They may hear all the words you have spoken but it does not seem to make sense to them. … Well there are a couple of reasons for this. First, the unsaved are still under the control of Satan and he steals the message of the gospel from them. Paul wrote in, read:

**2 Corinthians 4: 3 & 4**  And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **The god of this age** (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,

Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers. And Jesus in the parable of the sower said in, read:

**Matthew 13: 18, 19** “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.

The evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. We should understand then that it is not just apathy or indifference we are up against when we witness or invite others to church. Satan is actively at work in the life of non - Christians and he really does not want them to get the message. The person you are inviting or witnessing to may not think he is being influenced by Satan, but he is. Paul wrote in, read:

**Ephesians 2: 1 & 2** As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, which you used to live **when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air,** (Satan) **the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.**

So the message of the cross is foolishness in non - Christians because Satan is at work in their lives. They may not think so, but that is the reality. It should also let us know that we are not just up against the stubbornness of an individual when we are trying to get them to understand what we are saying. We are in a battle with Satan who will do all that he can to rob the person of the message of the cross. … But we have an ally who is much stronger that Satan. It is God who is also at work in the person whom he is calling. While we invite or witness our faith God is also at work in the person being called. It is God who lets unbelievers understand and respond to the call of the gospel. It is how God calls us. First he lets us understand, and then he works in our hearts to respond to the message or the invite. So there can be a second reason why a person we witness to just does not get the message that seems so plain to us. For those God is not calling, the message of the cross, the gospel of the Christian faith is foolishness also because God has not opened their minds or hearts. If God does not open the heart of the unbeliever they cannot understand.

The prophet Daniel was given visions of the end times, which we are now living in. Daniel wanted to know what the outcome of the visions would be. Daniel was told in, read:

**Daniel 12: 9 & 10** He replied, “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. **None of the wicked will understand**, but those who are wise will understand.

None of the wicked will understand. Unbelievers are spiritually dead, and as such there is nothing in them that will allow them to understand and respond to our witness or invite. God has to let unbelievers understand before they can respond to the gospel or an invite. You cannot believe what you do not understand. … Well it is God who lets us understand the message of the gospel, not our mental faculties. The apostle John also tells us in, read:

**I John 5: 20a** We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding,

The Son of God or Jesus comes to us through the Holy Spirit, so we see Paul confirming this concept in:

**1 Corinthians 2: 14** The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and **he cannot understand** them, because they are spiritually discerned.

So as I said before, we cannot believe what we do not understand. For those who God is calling, he is at work in their lives through the Holy Spirit to give them understanding. Jesus lets us know that the process is even deeper than just understanding. God first draws us to him and then enables us. In John 6 Jesus told his audience who were having trouble accepting what he was teaching, read:

**John 6: 44** Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws** him,

Then at the end of his discourse Jesus adds in verse 65:

**John 6: 65** He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has **enabled** him.”

Can you see a process here? God draws the unbeliever, then enables them by giving them understanding. If a person does not respond to your witness or invite it may be that God is calling them, but they are still “in process”. God has some more drawing or enabling to do, and you could be a part of that process. So there is another reason someone we are witnessing to may not respond to our witness or invite.

So to summarize the first part of our text – When we are witnessing our faith or inviting someone to church the prospect may not respond because Satan comes and steals the message from their heart, it may be that God is not calling the prospect and therefore they cannot understand because it is God who lets us understand, or God may be calling the person but the prospect is still in process. They may respond at a later time.

Now let’s go back to our text, to see the second concept in this text, read again:

**I Corinthians 1: 18** 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.

To bring this second concept to the forefront let me rephrase just the second concept, read:

For us who are being saved, the message of the cross is the power of God. (repeat)

As Lutherans we believe that God works salvation in us through means. For salvation the means he uses is the word of God, or as our text says the message of the cross. Above we described a process of being drawn, being enabled through understanding, and then believing. At each step in this process the message of the cross is the power that is being used to accomplish the process of unbelief to belief. There are a number of texts in the New Testament that verify the power of the bible to accomplish the process of conversion, read these 3 verses:

**Romans 10: 17** Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

**Romans 16: 25** Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,

**2 Timothy 3: 15** ….. you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus

The bible has power to work this process of conversion we spoke of earlier. When we hear the words of concepts found in the bible or when we read the bible or portions of it, it draws, enables by bringing understanding, and creates faith within us. God has caused his holy words, spoken through others; to be gathered together in a book we call the bible. It is a very reliable book. Both the apostles Peter and Paul testify that the authors of the different books in the bible were inspired by God as they wrote, read:

**2 Peter 1: 20, 21** Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but **men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit**.

**2 Timothy 3: 16** All **Scripture is God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

The bible has power because it is God’s word. The same word that brought about creation as God spoke creation into existence. ….So as we think back to some of the things that make it so the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, their own stubbornness and the action of Satan in their lives, we should also understand that we have a weapon on our side that God uses to work salvation in those who do not believe. Paul said we have weapons with divine power in our struggle with the forces that oppose Christianity. One of those weapons with divine power is the word of God, the message of the cross. So we should understand that the word of God, the bible, is not just another book. It has divine power. It has divine power to draw, enable by creating understanding, and bring about faith.

We should also understand that if God is calling the person we are witnessing to; Jesus is determined to see him saved and raised up to heaven. We read in, read:

**John 6: 39, 40** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

I shall lose none of all that he has given me. Those God has given Jesus are those God is calling. Jesus does not want to lose them. Jesus is on our side when we are witnessing our faith or inviting others to church. Jesus has defeated Satan and is able to counter all his efforts. So we should not give up on anyone. God wants all people to be saved, read:

**1 Timothy 2: 3 & 4** This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

God will not however overpower the will of a stubborn man. But he will draw those he is calling, using the message of the cross. We can see an example of what this sermon message is all about in the ministry of Paul. He comes to Philippi, the first place the gospel was proclaimed in Europe. He brings the message of the cross to them, and God opened the heart of a woman named Lydia to respond to the message of the cross, read:

**Acts 16: 13 – 15**  On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message**. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

Paul spoke the message of the cross to Lydia and God drew her, enabled her by gaving her understanding, and created faith in her. ….So do not give up on anyone. The message of the cross is the power of God for those he is calling.

We can bring people the message of the cross by inviting them to church where they will hear the word of God. Or we can give them the booklets I prepared which are full of quotes from the bible. Or we can tell them that God loves them and wants to give them the gifts of reconciliations and eternal life for free, and then invite them to church. Or we can give them a bible.

A closing thought. When you witness your faith, invite others to church or bring someone the message of the cross, there can be no failure. The entire process of conversion is in God’s hands. He draws, enables, calls, chooses, gives understanding and creates faith. If you witness or invite you are completely successful **every** time, because that is all your can do. The rest is in God’s hands.

May the peace of God which transcends all understanding guard you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.