

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

¹ *When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the testimony of God to you with superior speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴ My speech and my proclamation were made not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power; ⁵ so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.*

The True Wisdom of God

⁶ *Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are being destroyed. ⁷ But we speak God's wisdom, a hidden mystery, which God decreed before the ages for our glory ⁸ and which none of the rulers of this age understood, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written,*

*"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him"—*

¹⁰ *God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For what human knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. ¹³ And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.*

¹⁴ *Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.*

¹⁶ *"For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?"*

But we have the mind of Christ.

In a church's worship center a cross was prominently displayed behind the pulpit and choir loft. One Sunday when the pastor was on vacation a man, who was much taller than the pastor, preached the sermon. After the service a little boy who usually sat near the front with his family, mentioned to his father that he liked their pastor a lot more than the visiting preacher. "Why?" his father asked. "Because she's small enough for me to see the cross."

The child said more than he knew. In order for Jesus to be visible in us, the self-life must be invisible. In order for him to increase, we must decrease, which was a point John the Baptist made about himself as he spoke to his disciples, we read in John 3:30, that he said to them, "He must increase, but I must decrease." No one can impress people with the fleshly, or natural, ability and at the same moment present Jesus as the mighty one who saves. This is the point we hear Paul making in today's text.

Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church because they were struggling mightily. The city was a major cosmopolitan seaport and a major trade center. It was the most important city in Achaia, which is a part of Western Greece. The region was filled with idolatry and immorality. In

this setting, the Corinthian church, made up primarily of Gentile members, was established by Paul during his second missionary journey.

What a huge mission field that had to have been! It was filled with people who needed to hear the Gospel message. However, the Christians living here were challenged to remain faithful, and those who did, were challenged in how to communicate the Gospel message. The church today struggles with the same challenges.

In the section of my *Life Application Bible* that sets the stage for reading 1 Corinthians, it likens the situation using this illustration: "On a bed of grass, a chameleon's skin turns green. On the earth, it becomes brown. The animal changes to match the environment. Many creatures blend into nature with God-given camouflage suits to aid their survival. It's natural to fit in and adapt to the environment. But followers of Christ are new *creations*, born from above and changed from within, with values and lifestyles that confront the world and clash with accepted morals. True believers don't blend in very well."

Paul is a good example of a newly created person in Christ. He was once a Pharisee who hunted down Christians and persecuted and executed some of them. One day, while on the road to Damascus, he was overcome by a bright light and he heard the voice of Jesus speak to him. Jesus confronted him asking, "Saul," (which was his name before his conversion) "why do you persecute me?" He was blinded until his sight was restored three days later. This brought about Paul's conversion and he became a missionary for Christ.

Paul was not shy about sharing his conversion testimony. He also was not shy about sharing failures which taught him valuable lessons. One lesson he learned, prior to this text, and relevant to helping us understand the lesson he communicates here, involves another time he tried to share the Gospel message, of how Christ had to be put to death and rise from the dead with some intellectual Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens. You can read about this in Acts 17:16-33. These philosophers accused Paul of being a babbling, preaching about some foreign Gods.

He was taken before the council of the city, where he recognized some of the men as religious leaders. When he shared with them, some of the men felt the same way about Paul and his message as the philosophers did; but others were interested in hearing more.

Paul learned from this that those trying to share the Gospel message should know something about those to whom they want to share. As Paul spoke to the philosophers, he attempted to speak to their intellect; however, their spirit was not ready to receive the message. He realized he should have begun with a simpler approach to sharing the Gospel message of Jesus.

In the opening verse of our text, Paul begins by acknowledging how he began communicating the Jesus story to them deliberately using plain and simple lessons and language. He realized that he didn't dare speak to them in a manner that was over the heads. They would never understand the message he was trying to convey if he did that.

He also acknowledged his feelings of inadequacy and fear when it came to sharing the gospel with them. He didn't want to mess up. I like how the *Message* bible translates his comments on this in in verses 3-5: Paul said, "I was unsure of how to go about this, and felt totally inadequate—I was scared to death, if you want the truth of it—and so nothing I said could have impressed you or anyone else. But the message came through anyway. God's Spirit and God's power did it, which made it clear that your life of faith is a response to God's power, not to some fancy mental or emotional footwork by me or anyone else."

As one who preaches, I understand what Paul was feeling. I often feel inadequate and afraid. I wonder at times if I am doing an ample job of communicating clearly what is said through the scriptures. If one is a perfectionist, as I am, this sometimes makes sermon preparation a challenging task. However, if I put aside that whole perfectionist stuff and move forward with what I feel the Holy Spirit has laid on my heart, after my study of a text, a message comes together. I still may question whether what I have to say is adequately prepared, but once I present it, I know it's up to the Spirit to take it further to those who need to hear it.

You may feel the same inadequacies when it comes to opportunities you have to share the message of Jesus. Paul's point to us is that we should rely on the Holy Spirit to help us when we have those opportunities. The Spirit provides discernment and wisdom for how and what to communicate to the listener we have before us.

The Spirit gives us the presence of humility to present the message of Jesus and helps us to forego the temptation of trying to impress the listener, which often times works against the goal of leading a nonbeliever to Christ. At the same, we should trust the Spirit to give us the words we need to communicate the Jesus message. Many of us feel we are lacking in the knowledge and with the skills to share the Jesus story.

We may be afraid we will be asked questions that we cannot answer, and we think that will make us look foolish. I've had that happen; and yes, it's somewhat embarrassing. Some people expect pastors to have all the answers. I've come to terms with the fact that even though I've had lots of education to prepare me for being a pastor, preacher, and teacher, I don't remember everything I was taught; and there's no amount of education I could have received that would cover absolutely everything I could possibly need to know.

When we can't answer questions directed to us, we may start to question whether the Spirit is really with us in our sharing. Rest assured, the Spirit is with us. It just means we are being led to go and dig for the answers. We never have all the answers. We always are on the journey of learning about and seeking answers that lead us to God. Or it might be we are being directed to communicate some matters for which we do not have answers and they will always be a mystery to us, so then we need to rely on faith in God.

That takes us to another point in Paul's message. He says that, indeed, not everyone will understand what you have to share, but as long as you are communicating the truth of the Gospel as you are led by the Spirit, it's not your fault. The Gospel message appeals to the spirit within us—meaning, our own spirits.

Not every person's spirit is prepared to embrace the spiritual truths of the gospel, the principles of grace, forgiveness, loving everyone, even our enemies and selflessness. Some of these lost spirits have been manipulated and craftily shaped by the philosophies and values of the world. To those so deeply rooted in the lostness of the world, the Jesus story may sound illogical and laughable.

In other instances, a young Christian spirit is immature and hungry for spiritual nourishment and will be readily open to deeper lessons from Jesus that you can share. You will need to communicate to them in a plain and simple manner as Paul said he did to the new Corinthian believers. And there are those who are more mature in spirit who are ready to soak in all that you can offer them.

I've been talking about verbal communication, but let us not forget that the way we live also tells the Jesus story. There is something different about Christians. Paul was not going to be able to get everyone to listen to him because of the persecution he inflicted on Christians before

his conversion. For many, they needed to see his whole way of living was changed before they would even listen to his verbal message.

The Word, which we believe, gives shape to who we are. We don't live by the conniving and selfish ways of the world. We do not hold on to idols of wealth, lust and power. Christ moves into our souls and lives through us. People see it. Admittedly, some will think we are nuts or foolish; and others, those feeling empty or hopeless, will wonder and seek us out for answers—answers we can offer them.

If we are going to make a difference in our world for Jesus, we will need to get out of the way of ourselves. Our feelings of inadequacy in our skills and knowledge should give way to the power of the Holy Spirit. Our own personal need for all the absolute answers to the God questions, which we think we need, we need to surrender to faith in God—faith that holds firm even though there are mysteries of God we will never understand.

Our mistakes in life that leave us feeling like failures undeserving of such a holy task as being a communicator for Jesus should be laid before him, and we should embrace his gift of grace and forgiveness. Our attractions to the seductive idols and obsessions of this world need to be released, making way for the profound gifts of God in our lives.

Paul tells us that what we need is less of us, less of all of this stuff that holds us back; and instead, we need more of Jesus, by the power of his Spirit living in and through us. That's how we are going to get the message of Jesus and the salvation he brings to others. And, as Christians, both as individuals and as the church, that's what we are called to do.

You know, I truly believe we got this. We can handle this. We can do this. We already have, and we will continue to spread the Good News of Jesus. The possibilities of how we will do this are endless and our capabilities are greater than we can imagine. As we move forward, may we remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, which involves each of us living and breathing our commitment to living as less of me, and more of Jesus. Amen.