



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

March 10, 2024

Pastor John Jordan

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

First Lesson: [Numbers 21:4-9](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 32 CW

Second Lesson: [Ephesians 2:1-10](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 3:14-21](#)

Sermon Text: [1 Corinthians 1:18-25](#)

### The Message of the Cross

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace be with you, brothers and sisters, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The apostle Paul is writing to the church in the ancient city of Corinth. Paul had spent 18 months in this city, telling people about Jesus, and the people received his message in faith. A church was born. But as the apostle Paul leaves to continue his journey and ministry elsewhere, he receives a report from Corinth. Brothers and sisters, this is not a good report. There is a spirit of disunity. People in the church are quarreling among themselves. Can you believe that some Christians were looking down on other Christians? Like that never happens. So, after some church discipline in this part of the letter that we are going to read today, the apostle Paul points the Christians back to what is important. He points them back to the simple message that he preached, not with eloquent words, a simple message that encapsulates what Christ's ministry and His mission looked like and what God's power and wisdom looks like. (Read [1 Corinthians 1:18-25](#).)

I want us to take a moment and think about these two words, power and wisdom. What comes to your mind when you think about these words? Today we are so connected that we can hardly escape what the world is buzzing about. Do you notice how constantly information is thrown at us? Notification after notification; you do not want to miss or that; five life hacks that are going to change your life. Have you seen those videos that say "I was (this many) years old when I learned this"? We have access to so much information that it begs the question as to how our culture is changing in its perception of what power and wisdom looks like.

To define the word "power," I think that is a big word and there are many different types of powers in this world. But to narrow it down, I want to focus on the people, the power that they hold, the power of them influencing us, like a role model. We know that there are good and bad role models. Good role models can be people who are family members or coworkers or friends, people who we look up to. We see them put their best into their work. There are people who work in different vocations and occupations for the betterment of the world. They are like that one drop in the ocean, trying to make the world a better place. Not perfectly, they don't work perfectly, but they do it to their best abilities. But sadly, we do not see them much.

On our TVs and our social media, the majority of the influencers and people that we see are either doing something provocative or showing this great way to success; doing something crazy, rebellious and promoting the lifestyle that is firstly not true and sustainable, and secondly very dangerous for our own souls. Since there is so much information overload (we have so much access to information), it is hard to see what is true and what is not. Often, these kinds of influencers, they are the people that get the most views and people look at them and they gravitate towards them. The public gravitates towards that kind of idea of power because they see someone and in their perception, their life is all put together. When they gravitate towards that kind of power, and when we gravitate towards it, we start seeking wisdom in a place which is a very toxic place for our own spirit.

Something like that was going on in Corinth as well. The public was trying to find their role model. We see from the time of Jesus that the Jews were looking for a mighty man as their role model who would deliver them out of the Romans' oppression. The Greeks were looking for this new age philosopher who would now jazz their whole philosophy system, who would bring something new that would tickle their ears. People were distracted. The same thing was going on in the church of Corinth as well. The people were distracted. Some said "I am the follower of Paul." Others said "I follow Apollos." Others said "I follow Cephas." So just before this passage that we are going to focus on today, the apostle Paul asks the brothers and sisters the question, is Christ divided? And after directing them back to God's Word, the apostle Paul wants to tell them what is important and that is **the message of the cross** and the power and the wisdom that it holds. Paul says: ***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.***

The apostle Paul tells us that **the message of the cross** is the power of God, but what is our understanding of it? The section today is very important for us because we have become so familiar with the idea of the cross. We wear it on chains around our necks. We use it as decorations in our homes. We have become so familiar with the cross that we have forgotten what impact it had in the first century. It was a horrible symbol. If you would have used the cross as decoration in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, people would have thought that you have gone mad because even the idea of the cross, or a cross, made

people shudder. Roman citizens would avoid those roads where people were being crucified. Even this idea of the cross would make people shudder. To put it into perspective, the death sentence of a cross would be something like an electric chair today. Wouldn't it be strange driving across the country with church steeples having electric chairs instead of a cross as their symbol?

But Paul's focus is not on "a" cross. His focus is on "the" cross and the message that it carries. When he says **the message of the cross**, he is announcing the crucifixion of Jesus. This is something that we all understand. Christ did die. And various religious groups around the world also believe that Christ was crucified as it is a fact of history and it cannot be denied. Many religious groups also do agree that Christ was innocent. But for them, **the message of the cross** stops there. Brothers and sisters, believers in Christ, **the message of the cross** does not stop there. It goes further as it exposes the fundamental conflict of life.

The cross is important in Christianity because it reveals the life's core struggle. It goes beyond surface compromises and human disagreements because when you face the cross and what it signifies, you are confronted to make the ultimate choice—staying loyal to falsehood or embracing the truth. The cross in Christianity points to the judgment it makes on human life because when we say that Jesus was crucified, we profess our faith. We say that He was the person who was crucified, who had done nothing wrong in His life. He did live a perfect life. And going to the cross, He took upon Himself God's Judgment for all of us. This profession, brothers and sisters, challenges the notion of human righteousness because it implies that even with our best efforts, we fall short in comparison to the perfection that is displayed in the life of Christ. The cross serves as the reminder of our imperfections and the need for the divine grace. That is what makes **the message of the cross** so uncomfortable for people.

Many people do not like it. People think of it as foolishness. It is silly to them because they have a sense of independence and self-sufficiency because their perception of the world and power is based on media portrayal, dominance, societal norms and cultural influences. Their idea of wisdom is based on what they see in the world and their experiences with the world and how life is being thrown at them. Then to tell such a person that all their medals, records and achievements, even though they are commendable, they are not good enough to enter the kingdom of God. I think we all know how that conversation will go.

Last week in Beautiful Savior, as I was taking a Bible Class on evangelism, I asked the congregation, "What are your biggest fears about evangelism?" A young guy, who was probably around 25-years-old, as I asked him and I put him on the spot, he said "Well, you know whenever you want to open up about Christ to people, it always seems like people want to shun you and just drop the conversation right away. It feels like you have a target on your back." That is how **the message of the cross** is received in the

world—with a lot of adversity. So the apostle Paul reminds us that **the message of the cross** is a stumbling block for the people who do not believe.

But then what is **the message of the cross** for you and me, for the people who DO believe? Just like the unbelievers, we also get distracted. What happens when we are faced with that ultimate choice of either staying loyal to falsehood or embracing the truth?

Thankfully, brothers and sisters, we do not have to make that choice because God, in His power and wisdom, He is the one who calls us to be believers. If we had to make that choice, just like the unbelievers, we will always pick falsehood. Because of our sinful nature, we cannot recognize God. That is what the apostle Paul focuses on as he says, ***“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him...”*** We cannot know God through our own intellect, through our own wisdom because our impulses are exactly the same impulses as the unbelievers. But that is where the power of God and His wisdom comes and intervenes in history. That is how He has called us to be believers. That is **the message of the cross**.

When it is preached, it is received. When it is received in faith, it humbles us. It brings us to the realization that salvation cannot be earned. It has to be received. As we receive it in faith, it transforms us. It changes us. It changes our perception about the world. It helps us recognize that we can go to a financial advisor, ask him “What is the best strategy to pay off my mortgage?” or we can go to a life guru and ask him “What should I do? How should I make a change in my diet? What should I do for my life to make it better?” But what we cannot do is change our own nature. To change our own nature, we need the power that is not of this world. That is the power that is found in the Word of God. That is the power that is found in **the message of the cross**.

**The message of the cross** helps us recognize that the world, its perception about power and wisdom, is backwards. The world always wants us to be praised. We always look and gravitate towards that power where we receive praises. But **the message of the cross** helps us recognize that the first will be the last. That helps us recognize that the road to Calvary is a very narrow road. Only a few believers that take it, and the only way to take that road is that Christ holds our hands and takes us through that road. That is **the message of the cross**.

Brothers and sisters, we are in the Lenten season. As we are meditating on the cross and we are getting close to seeing how Christ was crucified and how He brings us victory and salvation, as we meditate on the cross and Christ to take up our crosses, let us not get distracted as the world does. Let us not try to find role models in the world for our spiritual guidance but look at the people who preach the cross in the fullness, just as the apostle Paul says, this is what the idea of power and wisdom of the world is, but brothers and sisters, ***“but we preach Christ crucified...”*** Let us look at Christ’s cross

and the message that it has because, yes, there are many different perceptions of power and wisdom. But Paul reminds us that ***the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.***

Shall we pray...

*We come before you with hearts filled with gratitude for profound sacrifice on the cross. Heavenly Father, we acknowledge the immense love you displayed by sending your Son, Jesus Christ, into this world. That through His sacrifice we are reminded that we need not strive to prove ourselves worthy of your love. Instead, it is through the power of the cross that we are being shaped into the likeness of Christ. During this Lenten season as we focus our gaze upon the cross, grant us discernment to recognize the crosses we bear in our own life. Strengthen us, Lord, to lift them up with faith. We lift up in prayer those who have not yet embraced your truth; those who have not yet experienced your power and the wisdom that is found in you. Grant us courage and wisdom to share the message of the cross with them, that they may come to understand that salvation is not earned but it is received through faith. Bless your Church, O God, amidst trials and tribulations. May it remain steadfastly focused on the central message of the cross that is that Christ was crucified for us. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, I pray. Amen.*