

**EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 7, 2021**

**SERMON "STAY NEAR..."**

**TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

The story is told of famed evangelist Dwight L. Moody came one day to blind hymn writer Fanny Crosby and asked her the question, "If you could have just one wish granted, what would it be?"

Moody expected her to ask for sight. Sensing this she is said to have replied, "If I could have one wish, I'd wish that I might continue blind the rest of my life." Moody was taken back and asked, "How can you say that?" Crosby was said to have responded, "Because, after being blind for all these years, the first face I want to see now is the face of Jesus."

Today is the third Sunday of Lent. We continue our music theme as we look at the beloved Crosby hymn "Near the Cross." The cross! A symbol of suffering redeemed to be regarded by Fanny Crosby, as a place to stay near "Till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river." Let's sing the first verse of "Near the Cross" together:

*Jesus, keep me near the cross,  
There a precious fountain—  
Free to all, a healing stream—  
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.*

- *Refrain:  
In the cross, in the cross,  
Be my glory ever;  
Till my raptured soul shall find  
Rest beyond the river.*

Let's look at our scripture lesson for today, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25:

**<sup>18</sup> The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. <sup>19</sup> As the Scriptures say,**

**“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise  
and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.”**

**<sup>20</sup> So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. <sup>21</sup> Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. <sup>23</sup> So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all nonsense.**

**<sup>24</sup> But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God’s weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.**

As we celebrate the third Sunday of Lent, we can easily look around our world and see how peer pressure and secularism is asking us to conform our beliefs. If we were to believe the world we would disregard the truths of Scripture. We would easily accept that all roads lead to the same God. Live and let live! How can Christians say there is only one way to be saved and that is through the person and work of Jesus Christ? It really doesn’t matter what you believe...just believe in something or believe in nothing! If push comes to shove ... we should accept the wisdom of the world and compromise the Words of Life because that is what good people in a good society do!

And then we come face-to-face with the cross! A symbol of the worst that society had to offer has become, to us, a symbol of grace, mercy, and hope. And the world will call us crazy!

In Corinth, Paul was dealing with an extremely dysfunctional young church. His letters are filled with teachings, chastisements, and encouragements as he attempts to help the leadership find their path as the “church.”

Part of the problem seems to be how some view the foundational instruction that Paul would have given them regarding Jesus’ work on the cross. In verse 17 Paul even states that he came, “...to preach the good news – not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power” (1:17b).

The church at Corinth was divided, and that division was causing problems socially and theologically. In our scripture lesson, Paul was reminding the Corinthians and the church universal (that includes us) that the gospel message does not measure up to worldly standards. We, as believers, must stand firm on the fact that the gospel is the only word of salvation to those who believe! The church has always had to resist and battle groups (often from within our own ranks) who would try to water down, change, conform, or add to the message of the gospel.

For Paul, one of the groups he had to deal with was first-century Jewish converts. They were still fully Jewish but chose to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. This group often stirred the pot, so to speak, by wanting all believers in Jesus to technically become Jewish and follow all of the Jewish laws and customs. For this group, if an individual died on a cross, obviously they were under God’s curse. They still held onto the wrong belief that God showed his happiness by pouring out material blessings and showed his displeasure by sending punishment, trials, and judgement. For the Jewish perspective, death was the ultimate loss. Paul’s teaching about what Jesus accomplished by his death on the cross was a stumbling block to them.

The other group Paul had to deal with were gentile, Greek believers. They looked at the world in a completely different way than the Jews. They lived in a world of thought, philosophy, and reason. They searched for rationality. As much as they believed in the gods (there were really very few atheists) there was no sense that a god would work daily in their lives.

Our religious heritage has truly been a battle of these two groups in the first century. As Christians, we live by faith, but we also love the scientific, the understandable, the reasonable and provable. Our religious heritage is with the Jews but our daily thinking is often very Greek. We should not be surprised when a world who does not know Jesus asks many of the same questions as our ancient brothers and sisters asked.

Paul's message is appropriate for us today and at times hard to digest. Paul tells us that the cross is a symbol of folly and scandal to those who have not had an encounter with Jesus. Paul is telling us, that without help from the Holy Spirit, the gospel doesn't make sense. It is nonsense. How can any kingdom come from executing your Messiah?

Paul then lets us in on the fact that when God intervenes in our hearts and our minds the "nonsense to the world" becomes "power to the believer"! As a believer, you need to preach the simplicity of the message of the cross and have confidence in it! That confidence means to preach the message as we have received it and not feel like you have to put a "spin" on it to make it more acceptable. People will either reject it or accept it...keep the message simple, true, and honest.

Jesus shared with us the truth of the cross in John 3:14-17:

**<sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.**

**<sup>16</sup> "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.**

## FOR TODAY

Why is the global church in such a crisis? Probably because we have imitated the church of Ephesus and lost our first love! The Ephesian church did many good things but they weren't the good things that mattered in the end. We have ceased to live in the shadow of the cross!

What do I mean by that? The cross was a tool of torture, pain, persecution and death. God chose the cross and crucifixion to be doorway to the forgiveness of sins, the changing of old into new, and eternal salvation. The ultimate tool of pain became the symbol of hope...and over the years we have taken the hope and forgot the pain. We forgot that the plan was to "take up our crosses and follow Jesus." Now many use crosses as jewelry and we adorn our houses with them as decoration. When we look at the cross do we get the warm fuzzies or do we get a lump in our throat as we once again realize that we were not worthy of Jesus' sacrifice and death and we drop to our knees and thank God that he deemed us worthy!

The reality of the cross is the shadow we live under. This shadow is not a cosmic guilt trip. It is meant to be a reminder to us that we live as grateful recipients of the gift of life. We are reminded that our belief system isn't meant to make us "feel good" in a world that has gone crazy, but rather that we have a responsibility to that world that is walking in darkness. We have the responsibility to:

**<sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt.28:19-20).**

The message of the cross is to be given openly and honestly. We speak the truth in love...but make no mistakes...we are to speak the truth regardless of whether the world likes the message. May we never get caught up in the practice of preaching "sin-lite".

**Near the cross! O lamb of God,  
Bring its scenes before me;  
Help me walk from day to day  
With its shadow o'er me.**

**In the cross, in the cross  
Be my glory ever,  
Till my ransomed soul shall find  
Rest beyond the river.**

Let's pray....