

**Second Sunday in Lent – March 1, 2015**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

***LOOKING FOR ANSWERS***

**1 Corinthians 1:22-25**

**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. 25) For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.**

Dear Friends in Christ;

Life is full of questions. Some are trivial, some more serious — and some tremendously important. What questions are on your mind today? Perhaps you have questions about your health, your financial situation, your job, your family or your future. Those are important concerns. But the greatest, the ultimate questions, are about God and your relationship to him.

Nothing in life is more important than this. Good health, financial stability, secure employment, a contented family, and a hopeful future are all things that people want. Yet even these are temporary and eventually pointless unless you have a living relationship with God, one that is clear and certain — and will last for ever.

So if you're

**Theme:** Looking for Answers to Life's Big Questions?

1. You won't find them in man's wisdom or strength
2. God reveals them to us in the cross of Christ

The apostle Paul proclaimed a message of vital importance because it had answers to some of life's big questions about our relationship with God. Questions like – is there forgiveness for my sin? Is there hope beyond this life? How can I get rid of my guilt?

Jesus is the answer to those questions: Jesus forgives our sins. Jesus assures us of the resurrection from the dead and life eternal. Jesus has taken away our guilt by being punished for our sins.

When it comes to seeking answers to the big questions of life, one will either look for the answers according to man's way of thinking or according to God's way.

Our text reminds us that the answers we are looking for can't be found in man's strength or wisdom. **Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom.** While both the Jews and the Greeks approached things from different philosophical viewpoints – they both ended up in the same place. They both rejected the message of Christ crucified which Paul proclaimed.

The Jews frequently demanded miraculous signs or marks by which they could distinguish the Messiah from other prophets. The OT scriptures had given them signs speaking of one who would come in humility – a suffering servant. But Jews didn't accept what the OT said – they wanted the Messiah to come with a show of power.

John 6:30 tells us that the crowds of people asked him, "**What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?**" (NIV)

Apparently, feeding thousands from just a single meal, restoring sight to the blind and raising the dead were not adequate for them. They continued to demand more and more signs and ultimately – they refused to believe in Jesus.

The Greeks were well known for their love of wisdom. They were impressed by human philosophy and systems of thought based on logic. However, the wisdom they were looking for did not begin with the fear of the Lord which as the Scriptures remind us is the beginning of all wisdom.

Like the Jews they continued to search but never found anything that truly satisfied. Neither the Jews nor the Greeks could find the answers to the big questions in life so that they could have peace, confidence, and contentment because they would not turn to Christ for the answer.

No doubt, Paul could have gained a big following among the Jews by appealing to their demands for a show of force that would appeal to their desire for a release from the tyranny of the Roman government. However, Paul proclaimed Christ who was crucified. **But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews...** The cross is where God provided the answers to life's big questions. His message really works. It provides forgiveness; it removes guilt and assures us of eternal life. It offers peace and contentment in any situation as we rely on the great love of God and shown to us by Christ crucified.

However, the Jews just couldn't come to grips with the fact that Jesus was condemned and crucified. They wanted a conquering Messiah with a world empire, not a condemned and crucified one. Jesus Christ, whose person and career were so contrary to the expectations of the Jews concerning the Messiah, that they rejected him and by their obstinacy made shipwreck of their salvation, became a stumbling block to them.

In the original language of the NT the word translated stumbling block was used to describe the stick which would hold an animal trap open. Food would be placed behind the stick and when the animal knocked the stick over to get the food the cage would fall on it trapping the animal inside. The Jews by refusing to accept Christ Crucified as their Savior would ensnare themselves in a trap leading to eternal death.

Sadly, the non-Jewish people represented by the Greeks and the Gentiles also refuse to accept the message of Christ crucified as the answer to life's big questions. Paul writes: **but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.** Later in this letter Paul would write: (1 Corinthians 2:14 NIV) **The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.**

To the natural human way of reasoning, it is stupid to think that God would send his Son to take on a human nature to help us. It's especially unthinkable that he would allow his Son to die so that by his death we might be set free from death. That's something natural man finds unappealing and unacceptable. It was as foolish to the philosophical Greeks and other pagans as it is to New Age thinkers today and anyone else who sees some inherent good in themselves.

By the grace of God and through the working of the Holy Spirit we have been blessed with a new way of looking at things. We reject the need for signs of earthly power that Jews demanded. We don't desire the wisdom of men. Instead we delight in Christ crucified – finding the answers to life's big questions as God reveals them to us in the cross of Christ.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that he preached Christ crucified – the stumbling block to the Jews, foolishness to Gentiles but to **those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

By the grace of God, people from all nations do come to believe in Christ as their Lord and Savior. They are invited through the preaching of the Gospel to believe that Jesus was crucified to take away their guilt and sin and to earn for them life eternal. By the grace of God, the message had an effect on their hearts so that they will enjoy those blessings through the faith that the Spirit worked in them.

It's clear that Paul had not been condemning all Jews and all Greeks of stumbling over Jesus and rejecting his cross as foolish. Those whom God has brought to faith view Christ as the power and the wisdom of God.

Only God's wisdom and power could plan and accomplish our salvation. What God planned and did might be considered foolish by many but such foolishness on God's part is better than the best wisdom that man can come up with in regard to his own salvation.

Some might say it was foolish of God to permit the crucifixion of his son. But what God did is beyond anything human beings could ever conceive and dream of. We could dream and devise any number of schemes by which a person could attain oneness with God, as ancient and modern philosophers have done and continue to do. But we would never come up with the plan that God did – to provide a substitute for us. His foolishness is wiser than our wisdom.

Some might say that what God did – again allowing his Son to be crucified – was something weak. But he did what we were powerless to do. He provided salvation for us through this act of weakness. His weakness is greater than our strength.

At times, we're tempted to rely on man's wisdom and power rather than God's. One of the ways we show that tendency is by our failure to realize what the really big questions of life are. When we allow ourselves to become overly concerned about our needs in this life, and concerns for our immediate future we're showing that we haven't quite come to terms with the fact that our eternal welfare is more important than this present life.

But when we understand that there is more than life in this world because of Christ crucified then we'll look to him for all the answers to our questions. We'll confidently trust him to provide for all our needs. (Romans 8:32) **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**

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