

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 12-13, 2021**

As for me, brothers, when I came to you, I did not come with superior speech or wisdom in order to proclaim to you the testimony of God. ² For I had no intention of knowing anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness, in fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not marked by persuasive words of human wisdom, but by a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

(1 Corinthians 2:1-5 EHV)

Welcome to the church version of "Jeopardy." Alex, I'll take "Church Mission Statements" for 200. Here's the clue: Teach, Train, Tell." Um, "What is the short version of Trinity's mission statement?" That's correct! "OK, Alex, I'll take church mission statements for 400." "Here's the clue: Three." "Um, how many parts will be in today's sermon?" "Again, correct!" "OK, Alex, I'll go for church mission statements for 1000." "Here's your clue: Teach the Word of God." "That would be, 'What part of the mission statement do I NOT have to be involved in?" "That's incorrect! Thank you for your participation...you may leave...you will not be invited back."

"Alex" is right. If you think you can sit out the first part of the mission statement/sermon, the "teach" part, because that sounds like the preacher's job, you'd be wrong. To teach/preach simply means to proclaim, and every one of us - preacher or not - is privileged to proclaim God's truth.

Teach the Word of God. God's objective, unchanging, absolute, saving Word. Where do we find it? Here, all of it is here in the Bible. What is it? Well, again, here it is, God's Word, all of it. God's truth is not negotiated or arrived at by consensus. God declares it. We proclaim it. We teach it.

And we can boil it down to two main teachings, Law and Gospel. Every worship service/every sermon conveys this simple, powerful, essential message: The Law shows us our sins. The Gospel shows us our Savior. In confirmation class, we use the acronym SOS (shows our sins/shows our Savior).

How do we proclaim this? To people and culture who find this book and its teachings quaint, fairy-tale like? To sophisticated, cosmopolitan, technologically savvy people who don't think they need a Savior because they're doing just fine...thank you very much...

Paul's advice is stunning. ***"I did not come with superior speech or wisdom in order to proclaim to you the testimony of God... My message and my preaching were not marked by persuasive words of human wisdom, but by a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power."*** (vv. 1, 4,5)

It must have been tempting for Paul to try to impress people with his words rather than with God's Word. The city of Corinth was a world-class city, very cosmopolitan. Apart from Athens, it was the leading city of Greece for commerce and culture, and not all of it was on the up and up. Sort of like Vegas. You know the slogan, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." Well, Corinth was known for its decadence, open immorality. In fact, a word was coined to back then to describe going out for an intense night on the town – "to Corinthianize."

People of Corinth, then, were quite worldly, impressed by worldly wisdom, philosophical discussions, impressive speakers. Paul could do all of these. He had a university education, he also had the best theological education, having learned from the well-known rabbi Gamaliel. He was the best of the best in knowledge in most any field and could communicate clearly and powerfully. But, in Corinth, on his first visit to establish a church there, he said ***"I had no intention of knowing anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness, in fear, and with much trembling."*** (vv. 1,2

Weakness and fear? The great apostle Paul? Before arriving in Corinth, Paul had passed through Athens, and there he'd had a bad experience. He tried to reason with the people, but didn't really get the chance to explain fully the message of Christianity. His time there felt like failure. And then he came to Corinth – another big city, more cosmopolitan people who loved commerce, culture, philosophy, and excellent public speakers.

So Paul put eloquence and superior/worldly wisdom aside. He set aside showmanship and kept it simple. Christ and him crucified. Christ and the cross. Christ and nothing else. Simple to the world is the same as foolish. But simple in the kingdom of God is true wisdom and power. The foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, stronger than man's strength. He proclaimed God's truth, and nothing but the truth, nothing other than the truth.

In Corinth, Paul's preaching was successful. ***"My message and my preaching were not marked by persuasive words of human wisdom, but by a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power."*** (vv. 4,5) For Paul, preaching was not about pedigree or creativity. It was all about Christ and him crucified, Christ and the cross. Because for Paul, the defining moment of his life was Christ on the cross, declaring of the punishment for sin, "It is finished."

This is the defining moment of our lives as well. Not graduation or first job or marriage or children or anything else that we've done. Christ and him crucified. Christ and the cross. Christ and what he's done for us. Without this simple but powerful message of the Gospel, we are hopelessly helplessly lost – enemies of God because of the guilt of sin. And just what is sin? Our world likes to rationalize and psychoanalyze and explain away sinful behavior or rename it or do whatever it takes to deflect the blame for transgressing God's Law – gossip, greed, impatience, anger, lying, bitterness, selfishness – it's an endless list.

But let's keep things simple. The wages of sin is death. You and I sin countless times. We're going to die, and unless someone else steps in & helps us/steps in & saves us, we're going to die forever outside the presence of God.

Someone did step in. Jesus Christ and him crucified on Calvary. Jesus Christ was also raised from the dead to leave no doubt that forgiveness is free, full, and personal – yours through faith, which is also God's doing, as the Holy Spirit works through the Word. Here is a simple, powerful truth: Christ on the cross, is the defining moment in the existence of every one who's ever lived and will yet live. There he paid for the sins of all. And it is only through the cross of Christ and his empty tomb that we can make it to heaven.

Once God's truth is preached and taught, the second part of our mission statement kicks in: train believers for lives of Christian service. The very end of Matthew's Gospel brings this into focus: ***"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*** (Matthew 28:19,20) Our tool for teaching and training, for nurturing faith and growing disciples is God's Word, which overflows with the truth of his extravagant love.

God is love. God's love is at the heart of everything he does and says. God's love is the motivation for everything we say and do as his people. We love because he first loved us. Jesus was asked "What is the greatest commandment?" He said, ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*** (Matthew 22:37-40)

This love is taught, but it is also caught, in the sense of modeling faith and offering our own lives as examples of Christ-like love and service. The night before he offered his life as the ultimate sacrifice of love, Jesus said, ***"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*** (John 14:34,35)

Time in the Word, commitment to service, putting others needs before our own, teaching/modeling/nurturing faith and love - all of this is involved in training believers for lives of Christian service.. ***"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love."*** (1 Corinthians 16:13,14)

This love compels us to reach out, to tell others the about Christ. Trinity's mission statement concludes: Tell the good news of Jesus Christ to the Northwoods community and to the world. As a church/school family, we are blessed with the teach and train aspects of the Christian mission, we're able to go deep into the Word. We also need to go wide, to reach out with God's truth & God's love.

The stunning, absolute truth, of Christ crucified and risen again drives home the point that evangelism – reaching people with the good news of Jesus' forgiveness – is the primary mission of the church. It is imperative that we – you and I – every one of us reach out with the Gospel. But isn't that the pastor's/teachers' job? What do we pay them for? Isn't going with the Gospel only for people who have the gift of evangelism, those who just have a real knack for sharing their faith? Honestly, the thought of going with the Gospel fills some of us most us of with fear, terror, dread, and nausea.

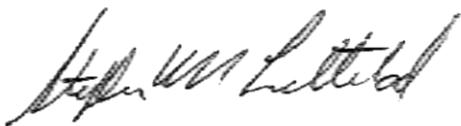
But God can use any of us to share his Word, to go with the Gospel. Paul makes that clear here. He didn't use a lot of fancy talk in order to impress people into believing in Jesus. He trusted in the power of God, trusted that the Holy Spirit was the One who would convert people's hearts. Going with the Gospel isn't about us and our way with words, it's about the Holy Spirit and his power.

"I had no intention of knowing anything...except Jesus Christ and him crucified." There's no better approach. Keep it simple. Stay away from the big words – eschatological, sacramental, redemption, salvation, justification, sanctification, benediction, invocation, supplication, catechism, Lutheranism, Wisconsin Synod, WELS. That's insider vocabulary, the kinds of words we use among ourselves because we know them. But most people don't talk like that in everyday life.

Lose the lengthy, memorized, sanitized evangelism presentations. Don't take people through the various views of millennialism or show them charts of all the different Christian denominations, indeed, of all the different Lutheran churches. Talk about what you know, talk about Jesus. His perfect life, his innocent death – Christ crucified. Talk about how he did something no one else has ever done .And when you don't have the answers to all the questions – and you won't! – do what Philip did when he couldn't answer Nathanael's questions. Simply say, "Come and see! Come and meet Jesus." Remember, the power doesn't come from us. God gives the Gospel its power, so let's get it out there, let's go with it, keep it simple and let the Holy Spirit work.

So, go. Go with the Gospel. Together as a church/school family, individually as opportunities arise. Reach out to as many people as possible as often as possible in as many ways as possible - using the Gospel. People are afraid, they have problems and challenges. There's terrible spiritual emptiness in the world today. People know that's there's got to be more to life than what they see. This can't be it. There's something missing. It's like an itch they can't quite scratch on their own. Only Jesus can fill that need.

Teach, Train, Tell. It's a memorable mission statement, but needs to be more than a mere slogan. This is our purpose, it's why we're here. Let's use it. Let's live it. Let's funnel all ministry efforts through it to keep us on track. And let's keep it simple. Like Paul, resolve to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.



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