

God's Power in Everyday Life

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-10



And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. ⁶ Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, 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 heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him" – ¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

When the Chinese Prime Minister, Li Keqiang, visited Berlin in 2014 for a conference, Angela Merkel went to a supermarket with him in between two meetings. She showed her dignified guest the vegetable selection and bought, among other things: rolls, greeting cards, iodized salt, and a St. Nikolaus boot. At the time, this visit to the supermarket was praised. With this visit, Frau Merkel had neither degraded her guest nor her position, rather she showed what everyday life is like in Germany and gave the normal life of the citizens special dignity. And that is exactly in stark contrast to most people. Most want to be better than normal! The advertising experts know this as well as politicians. That's why everything is always described with rose colored glasses or people are fooled into thinking that they could be something better than normal. Some people even now expect it from the church, that we should be something better than normal. We should invest more money in communicating a good image to the world. We should market ourselves better, and of course we should do that. But please don't withdraw from the reality of a normal life! And please, no halos! As a missionary, Paul preached the message of the Gospel all over the world. You could say that he was an advertising expert of the church. But his message sounded nothing like advertisements. It was the message of the cross. It was the message of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, this message affected people in their hearts because the message of the cross challenged everyday life and its normal worries and sorrows. That's why people have been baptized and became Christians. There was only one problem. Even in those days, people liked to make beautiful word pictures!

There was a popular teaching at that time that said something like this: there is a divine spark in every person. And it would be the primary goal of religion to create something good out of this divine spark. People then claimed that they would have the correct methods to inspire this divine spark with the right amount of effort and meditation so that one could reach heavenly heights. But all of that didn't work for everyone, just for the chosen ones who especially had this divine spark or who would work particularly hard. So one could ascend to one or another moral thought to find the divine origin again.

The Corinthians' way of thinking is an old story. It wasn't only present among these people in Corinth. Already in Paradise, the snake fooled the first people, saying: "having a clean slate is one thing, you can still have it much better. You can be like God." That was the sales pitch that could persuade and lead the first people astray. And it continues in the same way. As Satan tempted Christ, he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and said: "...You can have all of this, unspeakable riches, if you would only worship me." And then it happened all over again with the Jewish people in Jesus' time. These people wanted a messiah who would drive the Romans into the sea. The messiah would finally bring about a violent overthrow of the world powers with his heavenly army. He would make Israel great again. The people of that time were impressed with these thoughts and then the message of the Crucified Lord was no longer interesting. In fact, it was something despicable that had to be quickly glossed over! It was much more attractive to chase after idealistic goals. And that was a very dangerous path. This path not only brought the first Christians away from Christ, but also from their neighbors and their neighbors' needs. And more than anything, the people remain alone in their sins and in their daily distress! Paul had to step in. He had to call the people back to the cross. And Paul responds just like this: in his speech, he uses the exact words of the Greek philosophers and reverses them: instead of power and charisma, he came with fear and trembling and said, "God's power is not in the divine sparks but in the weak!" And then he explained to the people at the time and to us what would really sustain him and us: as a learned rabbi, he explained to the people that the wisdom of God lies hidden precisely in the absolute contradiction: God's power is human weakness.... the Messiah of the world is a baby in a manger.... the Crucified One is our Redeemer! There, He dies the most terrible death and also cries out in the deepest abandonment of God: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Usually, we aren't proud of godforsaken people... Isaiah describes it, saying: "He was despised." But it gets worse. The Man on the cross was and is God Himself. What a paradox! The Almighty God. We can also say that the highest, most desirable goal that we can even think of is turned into nothing, is completely despised and so small and far away from God. That is a stumbling block. When I hear people get angry, then I start thinking whether all of this could not be said differently! But it's precisely this point that is impossible to beautify – the cross must be a stumbling block. It must confuse. It must provoke us. That's because our own neglect of God is clearly portrayed before our eyes. Yes, if we imagine that all the bells and whistles about ourselves and our lives are not there, then we are quite pathetic and lost with our lives and our whole existence. And at this point, where we are at our lowest, it becomes clear what God does for us. The cross of Jesus Christ then shows us that God takes on our forsakenness. It is our Redeemer who doesn't look away when we are at our absolute lowest... It is He who stands at our side when we are at the end of our job, our marriage, all our hopes. He is not ashamed to be with us when we have fallen deep into sin. He is especially with us when all our strength fails us and we arrive at the end of our life. In Jesus, we experience God and His nearness daily! I also experience the unending love God has for us. This can only be passed on very simply and clearly. But then we are really amazed. The message of the cross, that which hinders people and appears so strange to them, does arrive. It has the effect that people around the world and from all cultures recognize this message as their own. Jesus Christ came very near to us on the cross and it's the same today, even now He is so close to us. We no longer need to measure ourselves by our success, our strength, our bank account, our weight, or our beauty. All these things are worthless. Instead, we put everything on the scale of the cross. There, it is clearly shown for us how precious we are, even when we are losers. It is also clearly shown what a future we will have in the heart of our God and then, all our weaknesses and failures and disappointments can melt like butter in the hot sun: "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden,

and I will give you rest!” says our Jesus. Is that possible? Yes, it is because God’s wisdom is wiser than the wisdom of man. Amen.