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Fourth Sunday in Lent

St. Paul's (WELS) Moline, IL

3:11

God's Gift of the Gospel

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

I. *Is received solely on God's terms, and;*

II. *is given to others only in God's strength and power.*

There are many dangers involved in mountain climbing. In addition to the external dangers such as falling rocks and crevices and even solar radiation as less and less ultraviolet light is absorbed by the atmosphere the higher you go, so too there are internal dangers. The human body is conditioned to operate under certain conditions, one of the more important being oxygen content of the atmosphere. The higher you go the less one's body is apt to deal with the lack of oxygen. This problem, can lead to sickness and even death.

Today as we continue in Lent we are drawing closer and closer to the great mountain of Golgotha where Jesus dies on the cross. As we go higher and higher to that mountain peak spiritually we encounter our own internal weaknesses and dangers. Today St. Paul confronts all of us with a danger that none of us is immune to: the danger of approaching and understanding God solely on our own terms and in our own manner. The Bible speaks of this danger plainly when it states: **"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."** (Proverbs 14:12).

How powerful is this problem? This problem is so powerful that it is able to work inside one's self and have them of their own will and accord walk away from Christ and all that He gives. The problem is so pervasive that no one can avoid it; the problem is so potentially powerful that the devil and the world use this one tool more than all others in its war against God and against His saints.

Today Paul states simply: **"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. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"** (verses 18-20).

What is Paul saying here? First, Paul is saying that no one can really know God and His will for us apart from His revelation. This we know is true. People through their thinking can know there is a god, they

can know and conclude that "something" is behind this grand and intricate universe but human reason, logic, and science could never answer who this is. No amount of reasoning or logic can come up with the fact that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Human logic could never conceive that God would take upon Himself humanity, be born of a Virgin and come to suffer and die on the cross to redeem the world. This comes only by God through the Bible. The Bible is the key because there alone God reveals Himself to us and to the whole world. Remember Jesus' words: **"The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."** (John 6:63).

Just as the people hated Jesus so today do they hate His word. To the world the message of God redeeming man by dying on the cross is foolishness. Today the world has degenerated into the belief that there is no such thing as sin anyways and that no one needs a savior. But this is nothing new to us, is it. Today is not just something which reinforces how bad the world is, but today is a reminder about our own sin, and our own weaknesses and the challenge we have before us in the faith.

Sad to say many Christians today have lost their love for Jesus and for the truth because their hearts are divided. I am quite comfortable that many of you here this morning have questions, or struggles, that have taken you to the brink possibly of complete disbelief and loss of faith. This is because when we receive the truth of God's Word that does have the power to create a new man in us but we still have our sin, and we still have our fallen reason and these raise up time and time again in our walk with God.

Ultimately the time comes for everyone exposed to God's word to either receive that Word as it actually is: the Word of God (see 1 Thessalonians 2:13); or to subordinate God's word under one's own judgment and experience. Ultimately one of these two will prevail: either the Word of God will reign supreme in one's heart or the world will, one cannot have both at the same time for they are contrary to one another.

This is shown in Jesus' dealings with followers while He preached who He really is.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna

and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. (John 6:53-66). And so some of them turned away and never came back.

And so too do many hear the call of Jesus today but eventually fall away because God does not live up to their human, faulty expectations. This is not only true of specific people but sadly it is true of entire church bodies today. Today there are some who want to have the wisdom of the word and to have God fit into that. But where does this lead? There are church bodies out there who say that the Bible is true only when it doesn't conflict with current scientific views or theories. Even these church bodies who once wanted to downscale the Bible's authority to that of morals and ethics today find that even the areas where the Bible states morality must be understood in a new light and in a fundamentally new way. In the end these church bodies look surprisingly like the world. They have lost their salt. Today many of these church bodies are rapidly losing members, especially the young. Often, when they inquire about why people don't support or participate in church and the answer is: what are you giving, teaching, or saying that is different than what we can get in other places? There is no answer.

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12). Just look at the logic and the motivation of the young man that Jesus talks about in the Parable of the Prodigal Son--the Gospel for today. There was a logic to his thinking that he could do better away from his father's house and be his own person. There was a logic in his spending his wealth away thinking that it was a better trade for the immediate pleasure it brought him. He was reasonable to hire himself out to someone else to provide for himself and finally it was reasonable and logical to weigh that position as a hired hand with what was more promising to go back to his father. Even his evaluation of how his father would receive him and his preparation of what he would tell his father makes a lot of sense--from a worldly point of view. The

problem was, in each step his worldly wisdom was wrong and served him poorly. Thankfully this young man had a good and loving father who responded more graciously and wonderfully than what would be expected. Today we have a Father like that too.

Thankfully our God doesn't work in the ways of the world; thankfully He is greater than that. God reminds us of this from the lips of the prophet Isaiah:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:9-11).

The power is in God's Word and God calls people through the Word and He accomplishes His will through the Word which is greater than the world and its wisdom. By God's grace we have this word in our hearts, in our minds and on our lips and by this word we give people the gift of everlasting life.

Today Paul tells us that, "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom," (verse 22), to this we remember Jesus' words, **"A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah."** (Matthew 16:4). To the Jews who wanted a Messiah on their own terms and according to their own expectations this sign was not enough for them, for the world looking for a God who fits perfectly into earthly, worldly wisdom this sign is nothing but foolishness.

When you share the message of Jesus with others you need not, indeed you cannot, argue them into the faith, for God and salvation do not come to anyone that way. When you share the message of Jesus you deliver the clear simple message of the Bible for if they believe the word as God speaks to them they will receive and believe the whole message of God, if they do not believe the message of the bible they will neither believe in Jesus who died for them.

"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." (verse 18). And, **"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."** (verse 25). Amen.