

Title: “Not Where We Expect”

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1 Cor. 1:18, 23

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Service Readings: Micah 6:1-8, 1 Cor. 1:18-31, Matt. 5:1-12

Often times we seek God where the world tells us to look – through wisdom, strength, even success. But he reveals Himself where the world only sees weakness – the cross of Christ. But it is here where God acts decisively for our salvation and where He gives Christ as our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

“Lord, not my will but yours be done.” How often have those words left your lips or consumed your thoughts? Maybe you were at the bedside of a loved one who’s health was failing. Maybe you, yourself were facing a medical decision, a choice that might bring healing or continued illness. Maybe these words were uttered in your prayers as you navigated a marriage that was falling apart. Our lives are anything but simple, anything but painless and as Christians we cling to Jesus, especially in these times. We bring to him our own will, entrusting them into his hands and submitting to his wisdom. “Lord, not my will but yours be done.”

In those moments we remind ourselves that God is good and loving. We cling to the promises that he has given to us through his son. And we stand firm in the belief that no matter how it works out, God will use it for his glory.

But what happens *after* the event? What enters into our minds if our loved one passes into the arms of Jesus? What do we conclude about God when the medical procedure was ineffective and we are left with continued illness? What do we assume about his presence, his power, his love when the divorce becomes a reality?

Sure, we continue to believe these true things of God; we continue to trust in his wisdom and goodness, but the voices of the world whisper into our ears. They ask, “if God is powerful, why did he not save your love one?” They challenge, “if God is so loving, why did he not repair the failing marriage?” You continue to stand

firm in your faith but these questions sometimes linger, sometimes even begin to consume your thoughts. And maybe you begin to wonder, not about his power or love, but how you are to *recognize* him in these moments. You want him to *show* you that he still here with you.

The world, Paul writes, demands wisdom and signs. And because we live in this world we are influenced by it. We know God is present and God is working, but we can never completely silence those voices – the ones that we hear questioning our faith in the God who would let a loved one die or a marriage disintegrate.

And this is where our expectations resurface – not in *what* we pray but in our lives afterward. Without even realizing it, we begin to look for God's presence in the *outcomes*: in the healings and prayers answered in our desired ways. And when those things don't happen we don't lose faith, not at all! But sometimes we can't help but feel that maybe God has withdrawn, that maybe he has remained silent on this one thing. We don't stop believing in him or his promises but maybe we struggle to recognize him when his actions are not ones that we had hoped for.

This too is what Paul was writing about. It was not that the congregation stopped believing in God; it was that they expected him to look different. Don't we often do the same? We look for God in his power to heal and restore, but when he acts in a different way, we wonder, even if just for a moment, how we might recognize God here, at the graveside or in the broken marriage. Our sinful nature wants a God whose power is obvious but our baptized life is taught to trust the God who *hides* his power and love in suffering, weakness, and kept promises. Luther once said it this way: "It is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross."

You see, what Luther and Paul are saying is that God makes his presence known through the promises of the cross. It is at the cross where God is hidden, but at the same time present. It is at the cross where his power is at work, even if it is not visible. It is at the cross where we find salvation, even though all the world sees is a lifeless body.

And as Christians we interpret our life there, at the cross, for it is there where God is most visibly present. Gregory Lockwood, the Concordia commentator for Paul's letter, once wrote that "the power of God is visible in creation, but the grace of God can only be found in God's Word and Sacraments, on the cross and in the Supper, which to the world appear weak and foolish." (page 65).

What Jesus offers at the cross is not vague comfort or a distant promise because at the cross, God is not just present, he is acting. God doesn't simply *explain* your suffering, he *enters* it. He bears them himself in the body of his son. God doesn't say "I'll spare you from all pain." Instead he says "I will not abandon you in it."

You see, at the cross God gives himself. At the cross, Jesus takes the sins that cannot be undone, the guilt that cannot be erased, the death that cannot be avoided. He gathers them up and carries them through the cross and to the grave. And because of this, even when healing doesn't come or relationships don't heal we are not left hopeless, we are not left abandoned.

The cross doesn't promise that everything will be fixed in this lifetime but it does promise that every second of suffering won't be wasted and that nothing will be left unseen or lost by God. The same crucified Lord who appears weak and defeated is the same crucified Lord who holds your life, your loved ones, and your eternal future in his hands.

And that is how we recognize God – not because the situations in our lives resolve themselves the way we desire, but because he has bound himself to us – from the cross, in his Word, and through the Sacraments.

There, in what looks foolish and weak, God gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation – and he never takes those gifts back.

So cling to the cross where in his weakness God acts most powerfully.

Please pray with me.

Lord, teach us to recognize you where you have promised to be—at the cross. When your ways are hidden and your work unseen, keep us trusting your promises. Hold us in suffering, strengthen us in faith, and fix our hope on Christ crucified, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.