

“Christ Crucified: The Wisdom of God”

Most of us have had that clumsy experience where we trip and fall, and quickly jump to our feet and look around to see if anyone has noticed. Of course, someone does, and comes to see if we're alright. You know the response – “I'm fine, I'm okay” – trying to get away from them, and the embarrassment, as quickly as possible.

This happens with little children as well. They fall, or bump into something – and as the parent comes to the rescue – their hand is up and they say, “I'm okay, I'm okay.”

Have you ever wondered why we have such a reaction? Why are we embarrassed by such things? Is it because it shows our faults, a weakness? It's certainly a matter of pride – an attitude that says – “I can take care of myself, I don't need anyone else's help!”

Sometimes you see this play out when you offer a meal to someone whose life has been turned upside down – and rather than receive the gift, the message sent is that “I can feed myself and my family.” Or, sometimes, I'll ask someone if they want to be included in the Prayer of the Church for one reason, or another – and they say no. Is this because they don't want to be seen as one who is in need?

“Let no one deceive himself,” the Apostle Paul says. “If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.”

In Corinth, Christianity was influenced by Stoicism – and one aspect of this philosophy or worldview, is an inward focus. The external things (*extra nos*) do not impact me – all that I need comes from within (*intra nos*) – from my virtues, from my wisdom. God's Word says – “Let no one deceive himself.”

We struggle with that same deception when we think of ourselves as self-sufficient – autonomous – independent ---- saying to God and the world – “I'm okay, I'm okay. I don't need your help.”

When we are like a strong-willed, hard-headed, independent child – our heavenly Father shakes His head at such foolishness. Again, and again He tries to teach us the truth – doing what is for our good – but we look inward, and shut out the external.

This is “folly with God” – and as you well know – sometimes you have to let the child (or grown-up) experience for themselves the truth you are trying to teach. And so, St. Paul says regarding those who think they are wise – “[The Lord] catches the wise in their craftiness,” and, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”

The Lord lets us go our self-sufficient, independent way – so that we might see the folly of our wisdom – so that our deception might be exposed – so that we might see our need, our dependence – upon God, and our fellow man.

“So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas” – and that includes boasting in your SELF. Apparently, there were some in Corinth who followed the teachings of Paul, others who followed Apollos, and others Cephas – saying we’ve got the true wisdom – we don’t need any outside help.

No one likes a “know-it-all” – or, “I’ve got it all.” God says, that’s foolish.

“All things are yours,” He says. Paul’s teachings, Apollos and Cephas’ teachings – all preachers of God’s Word are yours – for it is I who am preaching and teaching you – giving you My Words – my external Word which is necessary for your salvation!

And not just this external Gospel is yours – so is “the world.” God is at work in the world, outside of you, for your benefit. Dr. Luther writes in the Large Catechism, regarding the Fourth Petition and our Daily Bread:

“With many words one could list all the things that are included, like when we ask God to give us food and drink, clothing, house and home, and health of body. Or when we ask that He cause the grain and fruit of the field to grow and mature well. Furthermore, we ask that He help us at home with good housekeeping and that He give and preserve for us a godly wife, children, and servants. We ask that He cause our work, trade, or whatever we are engaged in to prosper and succeed, favor us with faithful neighbors and good friends, and other such things You see, in this way, God wishes to show us how He cares for us in all our need and faithfully provides also for our earthly support.” (LC, 76, 82)

This is true wisdom, Godly wisdom. That's why the Christian believes and confesses – “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

“All things are yours ... whether ... life or death.” As a 16th century theologian asks in his catechism: “What is your only comfort in life and death?” Answer: “That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and death – to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” Or, as St. Paul writes in Romans 14:8 – “Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.”

What a foolish thing it is to stand before the judgment seat of God on the Last Day – or today – and say, “I don't need your help.” “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” To say that I don't need the blood of Jesus Christ to cover my sin – is foolish, and futile.

“If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.” God is calling us to repent of our self-sufficient wisdom – our independence – our proud thinking that we know all things and can do all things.

As Jesus says, we must become like little children – not the stubborn, strong-willed child – but the infant who is dependent upon others for all their needs of body and soul. We must empty ourselves, deny ourselves – that we might be filled with all things that the Lord graciously provides and gives to us – most importantly, Christ and His salvation.

That's why the Christian church, with the wisdom of God, preaches Christ and Him crucified. That's why we confess that we need help. If we are to be saved – it must come from outside of us – from God the Father, who cleanses us from all our sin, saving us through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Dearly beloved, “All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.” Jesus Christ, crucified and raised to life again – is God's salvation for sinners. Christ crucified – your wisdom and your salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.