

Pastor's Message – 2/5/2023
1 Corinthians 2:1-12
Isaiah 58:8-12

Perhaps you've been to the eye doctor and they throw the slides up on the wall or show you cards and you are supposed to guess the numbers in the picture. Most of time I've been able to see the numbers - I trust they would tell me if I were wrong - but some can't and that is part of the point of our reading from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians today.

On every fourth Monday of the month, the clergy of our United Methodist Circuit, from Beaver Dam: Trinity, Randolph/Courtland, Mayville, Horicon/Lowell/Juneau, and I gather for a lunch meeting. This past Monday, we were talking about education since one of our group announced that he wanted to go on to get his Master's Degree in Divinity. So, we started discussing just how much and what kind of education is necessary for a pastor.

Education isn't always the be-all and end-all for a pastor, or for anyone, for that matter. There are different kinds of knowledge. There is book-smart and there is street-smart. Some lack common sense. There is conventional wisdom. There are different kinds of knowledge and different kinds of wisdom.

Paul starts out the second chapter of his letter today talking about words and wisdom. Among the most popular and revered individuals in Paul's day were the professional, itinerant orators, skilled and educated in rhetoric, who could extemporize on virtually any topic, and mesmerize less with substance than with style. They could talk about anything, at any time. With these Paul contrasts himself, who has only a haltingly-delivered, simple message for the many - "Christ and him crucified" - and wisdom for "the mature." Yet even that is not the achieved wisdom of the learned, but the received wisdom revealed by the Spirit of God.

The apostle James speaks of two types of wisdom: the wisdom that is from above and the wisdom that is "earthly, unspiritual, devilish" (James 3:15). There's the "wisdom of Solomon," the "wisdom of the world" and the wisdom of a person who is "wise in their own eyes" (Isaiah 5:21). There's wisdom as humility (Socrates); wisdom as knowledge; theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom (Aristotle); and wisdom as rationality. Paul is writing today about wisdom, but a different kind of

wisdom — God's wisdom. “I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world” (v. 6). It is a wisdom that was “previously hidden” (v. 7).

The question then is: “From where does that wisdom come?” The answer through the Spirit of God. Just as human beings best understand what it means to be human, “so also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God” (v. 11). When Paul went to Corinth, what was the focus of his preaching? Jesus Christ “the one who was crucified” (v. 2). If we get deep into Jesus Christ, we can more safely make the claim to understand the wisdom of God. Paul, in fact, says that he “has the mind of Christ” (v. 16). And when we are in Christ and the mind of Christ is in us, we can “know [and share] the wonderful things God has freely given us.”

The problem comes to us, and we are in good company with many Biblical characters, that many Christians are uncomfortable sharing the Amazing Grace! and blessings that they have received. Not everyone is called and gifted for public speaking and some people even struggle sharing their faith in small groups or one-on-one.

How many of you know the country singer, Mel Tillis? If you know him, you may be aware that he has struggled with stuttering his whole life, but when he sings, the stuttering goes away. The message of his music comes out in the singing.

It can be hard to listen to and understand people who have speech impediments. I have my own that I have to be aware of and work to overcome. With those people, we have to listen more carefully. And when listening, we have to listen beneath the words, on a deeper than surface level. We have to see with different eyes, hear with different ears, and pay attention from another perspective.

In Paul's letter, he invites us to live our lives with “the mind of Christ.”

When we listen to the State of the Union speech, we are to listen with “the mind of Christ.”

When we watch the Super Bowl, we are to watch with “the mind of Christ.”

When we root for Olympic athletes, we are to do so with “the mind of Christ.”

When we do our grocery shopping, we are to do so with “the mind of Christ.”

Indeed, there is no experience so pointless or mundane that it escapes this perspective. From tying our shoes, to choosing a flavor of ice cream, to buying a car, to voting in an election -- we are called, as Christians, to do them all with "the mind of Christ."

And all Christians can do that, listening and speaking and acting from that perspective, recognizing that Christians who have the mind of Christ have a great and valuable gift, the news of God's Amazing Grace!, to share.

Once upon a time there was a water-bearer in India who had two large pots, one hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it -- and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

This went on for two years as the water-bearer carried the pots. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water-bearer one day by the stream: "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able for these past two years to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water-bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path."

Indeed, as they went up the hill the old cracked pot saw the stunning, colorful flowers on the side of the path and felt a little better. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of

it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

We started reading Isaiah 58 in the 8th chapter today, but the first verse is worth noting, "Shout loudly; don't hold back; raise your voice like a trumpet" If we're going to blow our horn, we should do so with the news of how being in the mind of Christ spread the good news of God's "Amazing Grace!" When we have the mind of Christ, we can realize the prophecy of Isaiah. "Your salvation will come like the dawn." "The glory of the LORD will protect you."

When you have the mind of Christ, you "feed the hungry and help those in trouble." As Psalm 112 says, "They shine in the dark for others who do right. They are merciful, compassionate, and righteous. Those who lend generously are good people . . .They give freely to those in need. Their righteousness stands forever."

*Then your light will shine out from the darkness, Isaiah continues,
and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.*

*¹¹ The LORD will guide you continually,
giving you water when you are dry
and restoring your strength.*

*You will be like a well-watered garden,
like an ever-flowing spring.*

*¹² . . . you will be known as a rebuildder of walls
and a restorer of homes.*

It doesn't take lofty words or impressive wisdom to tell God's plan and desire for the world and the people who live on it. It doesn't take clever or persuasive speeches. What it does take is being so close to God that the mind of Christ is your mind also and as you share the good news of God's love and the Amazing Grace! that God offers and showers upon you every day, others hear and see and know the love of God as well. Flowers bloom as you acknowledge the Amazing Grace! you are offered and share with others.