

Sermon about 1 Cor 1, 18-25 on 5th Sunday after Trinity 2021 in BXL (III^N)

Blessing: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Bible: (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.

Prayer: In Your name, O crucified Lord Jesus Christ, we have gathered here today to remember Your deed for us. You suffered the all-painful death on the trunk of the holy cross as the true, patient, sacrificial Lamb for us. Rule our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, refreshing them with the heavenly dew of Your grace. Preserve us with Your divine love and hide us – body and soul – in Your holy wounds. O faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ, our only solace, hope, and life. (Amen.)

Sermon: *Opener – foolish faith remains:* “We are beggars, this is true”. These were presumably the last words of Martin Luther, found written on a slip of paper on his desk after he died. – “We are beggars, this is true”. At least in the face of death, we may realise that nothing from this world and our previous life can help us anymore. There is nothing we could take with us. Nothing with

value anymore. What remains is just our faith. – It is a strange thing, this faith. What does it help? Is it useful, still convincing today in a world of science? – A few days ago, I read an article about atheism. That on the one hand the amount of people in western countries who believe in God is still decreasing. On the other hand, they become no real atheists. This would mean they would fight any idea of a higher being or god. But the biggest group of people who deny God and/or Jesus Christ, just say that they “do not know” if there is something. They are sceptic, or just not really interested, maybe too lazy to discuss the question. This is called “agnosticism” – “not knowing” anything about a God. – In the end, when you examine these very different opinions of agnosticism, you can see that they do not have in common a philosophical perception of God and the faith, but a critical view on the institution church or church history. They usually do not differ between the message of the faith and the institution church. They just trust in science and count the faith as a foolishness and justify this with the acts of the church which often – indeed – were, or are not, very Christian at all. (There are even people who leave the protestant church because the Pope has said something they deny.) – But in the end, they even have less in the face of death or disaster than people who believe, *they* have nothing anymore then.

1. Faith against science is a sham alternative: At least since the Aufklärung in the 18th century, science was more and more placed against faith. Faith was for the dumb who do not understand natural laws and science. Still today, especially in the pandemic, we have seen this primacy of science. “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing...” – Now, I do not want to diminish science. Science is way too important and interesting. No, the mistake is bringing science and faith – (natural) world and heaven – on the same level. It is about comparing apples with pears, as it says. The wisdom of the world is not a bad thing. It is still *wisdom*. But it is *in* the world and *from* the world *for*

the world; not beyond it. My professor for dogmatics said in these moments “it is a false or sham alternative” – comparing two things which could not be weighed out against each other. And in doing this, the wise prove themselves as fools because they have not understood the wisdom as the wisdom of the world, created by God for mastering *the world*; not to master heaven. Wisdom and science will fade with the world, but the message of the Cross is a different thing, it is *power*, in Greek a “dynamis” (the word dynamite comes from it – something which can blast heavy weighing concrete away), something active, on the move. It is the power *to cross* the border of world and death. The message of the Cross and our faith does not want to explain nature and life. But it wants to give *meaning* to life! – Recently, I watched the remake of “The Lion in Winter” about the English king Henry II and his attempts to preserve his kingship. If you watch the film carefully, you can trace the dramatic, sad human existence. You might have every chance and power of this world to shape your life according to your wishes like King Henry, but in the end, you cannot go beyond your will and your life and the circumstances of your life. Finally, king Henry and his wife must acknowledge: “There's everything in life but hope.” – To *sur-vive*. To master life, we need something from the outside of life. Hope foremost. This is the message of the Cross, received in faith by the Holy Spirit.

2. In this sign you will overcome: What is this message of the Cross? The cross was the most disgraceful and infamous execution the Ancient world knew. In the first three centuries, Christians would not have dared to use the cross as their symbol of faith. This changed after the year 312. Before the famous battle at the Milvian Bridge at the doors of Rome, emperor Konstantin, later called the Great, had this vision to use the cross styled monogram of Christ as his symbol in the fight to win and overcome his opponent. In his vision it was said: “In this sign thou shalt conquer.” Konstantin won and made the Christian faith

as the foremost religion in Rome. From this moment on, Christians started to use the cross as a symbol of their faith, as symbol to overcome evil and death.

As well we see here how God was pleased to act through the folly. It is paradox, against all worldly, human wisdom: God used the cruellest thing, to overcome the cruelty of death, of a lonesome death. The moment when Jesus Christ died on the Cross, hell, death, and devil were conquered. The world was set zeroised and life could start again. The victory of life is in the deathly cross. This sounds foolish, but it is God's plan for the world.

3. *The symbol of life.*: The Cross became the symbol of connection between heaven and earth like a bridge across the abyss of sin, failure, loneliness, despair, senselessness, and death. The Cross, or rather the message of the Cross, is a critical power in the world to change the world. To bring strength to the weak, to bring healing to troubled minds and bodies, to bring meaning to the lost, to bring hope to the desperate. The Cross *crosses* death, evil, and oppression *out*. But the Cross became also the *crossroad* for everyone in all times: do I follow the sign of life, even when it does not look very nice or do I choose the other way, trusting just the world? The Cross is also the symbol of the crisis – the crisis of God, the crisis of the world, and my personal crisis. “Crisis” as described in Greek is the important moment when you must do an assessment and take a decision. Often, we have these moments after a great failure, when we hit the ground hard and realise that we must do something different. The Cross is the crisis for everyone: it is the moment when we realise that we are beggars as Martin Luther wrote; but with the Cross we become children of the King, citizens of heaven. A prospect and covenant no wisdom in the world can give you. Therefore, the Cross became the tree of life in the time of Romanticism.

Aim – God is greater: The Holy Cross is God’s symbol of His relativity. The Cross relativises the world and its wisdom. It relativises life, and wisdom, and earthly power, and wealth and so many things – but it relativises also health, affliction, poverty, persecution, even darkness and death. Worldly wisdom is not bad but will never give a sustainable hope and life beyond death. Abram knew this or at least he trusted in this message. With his 75 years he was already dead, but God relativised even that. He became father of a boy. The disciples as well when they went out against all human experience and wisdom by going fishing again on the bright day. And they experienced God’s leadership and wisdom so many times later more. This Gospel culminated in the apparently *failed messiah* Jesus Christ at the Cross. God’s wisdom of life was greater, and this was seen on Easter morning and since then so many times in so many lives on earth through the generations all over the world. This is God’s wisdom and science: to be with the weak, the small, the sick, the poor, the little ones, even with the dead.

In this Gospel of the Cross lays our future and the future of the Church, so small she might be. Let us keep this in mind and heart and let us trust in this message of the Cross. – Let’s pray with the last stanza of “Abide with Me” (LSB 878):

Prayer: “Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes; / Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies. / Heav’n’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee; / In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.” Amen.

Blessing: The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Amen.)