

“Two Stories, One Truth” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Epiphany 4

February 1, 2026

- I. **1 Corinthians 1:18** – ¹⁸The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
- II. **What a powerful text for us to consider today in 1 Corinthians.**
 - a. The city of Corinth was a port city that had visitors from all over the region.
 - i. Ships could take a short cut through Corinth and save many miles at sea, and it was in an important province of Rome.
 - ii. There was a population of Jewish people there, but the larger population was non-Jewish (or Gentile).
 - iii. This letter is setting the church in Corinth straight about divisions and the sins that cause this trouble.
 - b. You see, the members of that church were holding up leaders based on their power, like healings and miracles, or their wisdom, like convincing arguments and persuasion.
 - i. The response to church members dividing up by a leader’s power or wisdom is: Some people want God to prove Himself with amazing signs and miracles... others want God to sound very smart and impressive... But we tell everyone about Jesus dying on the cross... and some people don’t like that message and think it doesn’t make sense... but for the people God calls to believe, Jesus shows how strong God really is and how wise God really is. (vv. 22-24)
 - ii. God and His ways are weak and foolish to those who have no faith... but for all who believe, “Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (v. 24)
- III. **Sometimes, we get a chance to share this weak and foolish message.**
 - a. It’s not too often, but occasionally, we connect with a person who has no idea what Christianity actually teaches and are willing to hear us out.
 - b. Many years ago, I remember a man who attended our C-101 class for a while... and he knew very little about the Christian faith or the Bible.
 - i. I will just call him Ben... and his experience about Christianity was mostly formed online, but he decided to learn more about it by coming to our C-101 class.
 - c. As I went over the parts of the Apostles’ Creed that talk about creation and Jesus Christ, Ben had a look on his face like, “I’m not buying this...”
 - i. He didn’t show up the next week, so I followed up with an email... and that turned into several emails over a period of six months or so, and going out for coffee too...
 - ii. As I learned more about his story, he was sort of an intellectual, so buying all this miracle stuff in the Scriptures was very difficult.
 - 1. Ben was more into the scientific method and if you can’t verify something through empirical evidence, then it is probably suspect.

2. We talked a lot about creation, sin coming into the world, and Jesus who died and rose again to save us from our sin.
3. Over time, I felt like some of our talks might be getting through, but then the emails and connection stopped.
4. I waited a while and emailed to see if he was doing okay, and he responded with a terse, I've decided that Christianity is not for me... I just can't believe in a God who supposedly became a human and died for me... but I will keep exploring and searching for truth.
5. Ouch... The only pure truth in all the universe comes with the Christian faith and Jesus Christ – and Ben wanted to keep searching.
 - a. I had a sense of grief over his rejection of the one true God, and hope that he comes to faith Christ one day... and yet I also thought, "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing..." (v. 18)

d. Perhaps you can relate to that story when it comes to a loved one or someone you know.

- i. I often hear stories about a daughter who decides to be Buddhist instead of being Christian as she was raised all her life... or a spouse who is an atheist, and now the children don't want to attend church because they've been taught that God is a fairytale... or a Confirmation student who doesn't feel like God is all that important in her life, and the parents just shrug their shoulders and say, "Well, it's her choice."
- ii. Maybe you have a lost and troubled family member... or a coworker you really like... or a friend you've known since high school, and they want nothing to do with your "religion" because whatever anyone believes is just fine for them.
- iii. To each of these situations, ouch... the only truth is found in Christ and the Scriptures, but to those who are lost, it's just nonsense.

IV. **Strange, but I think a story about wisdom applies here.**

- a. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were seeking what? Wisdom.
- b. As Eve considered the words of satan, it says that she looked at the fruit and it was desirable to gain wisdom. (Genesis 3:6)
- c. The sin was desiring to know what God knows... to gain wisdom on our own... to be God.
- d. Being our own god is worldly wisdom at its finest... in other words, we make ourselves out to be the one who decides... the one in control... and the one who determines truth... except that's foolish.
 - i. And Paul asks, "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?" (v. 20)

- ii. It is clear... the wisdom of the world is not from God, and it is foolish because it takes us away from Him rather than toward Him.
- e. It's interesting that God didn't want Adam and Eve to get to the next tree in the Garden of Eden, or they would be forever in their sinful state – the Tree of Life.
 - i. They had already attempted to attain wisdom on their own... and now, if they ate of the Tree of Life, they would never die.
 - ii. God kept that tree from them by closing off the Garden forever... but it also came with a promise.
 - iii. God would not leave them without hope, as He would offer another tree of life – the cross of Christ.
 - iv. Foolish, worldly wisdom entered the world through one tree... but through the tree of the cross, God's true wisdom would be shown.
- f. The cross brings life because Jesus willingly died upon it to take the entire debt of sin upon Himself... opening the door for forgiveness and being made right with God.
 - i. It makes no sense to be weak... powerless... to say no words to plead but remain silent... but Jesus chose the way of the cross to give us the greatest gift.

V. **There is a second story**, different from the one about Ben that I began with.

- a. Robert battled cancer for nearly ten years, enduring surgeries, radiation, chemotherapy... until all the options were exhausted.
- b. A friend gave him a palm cross that he could hold onto and pray.
 - i. Robert said that cross reminded him that Christ had even conquered cancer, and that if Christ had done that, He could certainly forgive his sins.
 - ii. His kids didn't understand and joked with him about his cross... they didn't get the comfort and promise it had.
- c. The night before Robert died, the pastor visited him and his wife, and together they laughed, cried, and shared the Lord's Supper in his hospice bed.
 - i. To human eyes, it looked insignificant, just bread and wine, yet for Robert and his wife it was nothing foolish, but the very promise of Christ's forgiveness and life.
 - ii. Then the pastor marked him again with the sign of the cross first placed on him in Baptism a lifetime earlier.
 - iii. As the pastor's voice was filled with emotion, Robert took his hand, placed the cross in it, and said, "Don't forget... Jesus died for you too."
- d. To those who don't know, who don't understand, it's just a hunk of wood...but to us who are saved, by God's grace through faith, the cross means everything.
- e. These two stories show us the foolishness of the world versus the wisdom of God... but there is only one truth... The word of the cross... the Word

made flesh!... Jesus is the power of God for our forgiveness and salvation.
Amen