

February 5, 2017
Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
1 Corinthians 2:1-12

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

1 Corinthians 2:1–16 (ESV)

¹ And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. ⁶ Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— ¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

The event today is about someone important and something significant. Super Bowl LI (51) will be played at Reliant Stadium in Houston, Texas. We've already heard plenty about the New England *Patriots* and the Atlanta *Falcons*.

There have been plenty of words. There has been an abundance of "lofty speech" and "wisdom" from players and coaches, from fans and commentators, in print and on TV and on countless sports talk shows. But, in a week of media blitz, with thousands of reporters grabbing and grasping for any kind of story, most of it has really been saying a lot about nothing until the game is actually played, it's just a bunch of words.

And the game will settle it all. Someone will do something spectacular. Or something will happen to someone that's unexpected and either awesome or awful.

All of this is the complete opposite of how Paul addresses the Church at Corinth in the second chapter of his first epistle. Paul says he didn't come to them with lofty speech and wisdom. He *didn't*, in fact, have a lot to say—at least not about a lot of different things.

Certainly, he *didn't* say a lot about nothing.

So here's what is before us in today's text: Paul's words are filled with a triple negation—not, no one, nothing—that becomes wonderfully positive. In fact, from this Word of God we will discover and rejoice that

"Nothing" Means Everything.

What do we *want* to see and hear? What do we *need* to see and hear? What do the redeemed people of God need to hear? What does the fallen world need to hear? This is what Paul addresses when he says to the Corinthians in our text:

"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (v 2).

The Gospel does *not* rest on and is *not* revealed by the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. For Paul did *not* come proclaiming with lofty speech or wisdom. “*I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom*” (v 1).

In fact, Paul quotes Isaiah 64:4 “*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him*” (v 9).

Yet the Epiphany light has revealed the promised Savior to a blinded world still trapped in the darkness since our fall into sin.

It is “*not a wisdom of this age*” through which the Gospel is learned (v 6), but it is only when God works His revelation, for “*we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God*” (v 12).

Indeed, Paul’s speech and message “*were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*” (v 4b, emphasis added), “*the power of God*” (v 5b).

Because the Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church” (Small Catechism), “*no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God*” (v 11b).

“None of the rulers of this age understood” God’s “secret and hidden wisdom” (vv 8, 7), and, in ignorance, they crucified the Lord of glory.

They did not—they could not—understand that God’s wisdom was greater and that it had been in place “*before the ages*” (v 7). They did not understand—and, without the Spirit’s work, neither do we—what God prepared and what the Spirit made known.

Truly, *no one* can grasp God’s eternal plan, from first promise to final fulfillment and future glory. *No one* can grasp how God thinks and, so, how He acts—that He acts not in judgment and condemnation, but in mercy and grace, in kindness and love.

No one can discover the Good News of salvation.

We might try to figure God out, but we fail.

Our struggles can and should turn us from our attempts at spiritual knowledge to looking at the Word. Because on our own, Indeed, we know nothing!

The Know-Nothing Party

In the 1840s, strong anti-Catholic sentiment arose among certain native-born Protestant Americans who saw foreigners and Catholics as a threat to their economic and political security.

In 1849, the secret *Order of the Star Spangled Banner* was formed in New York City. Soon after, similar lodges formed in many other American cities. Members, when asked about their exclusionary, nativist organization, were supposed to say they knew nothing, hence the name the “Know-Nothing Party.”

Paul’s words to the Corinthians are even stronger than the claims of this long-forgotten American political movement. He states what was always true for him—and what is always true for the Church and her pastors: *“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”* (1 Cor 2:2).

But this text reveals the heart of Paul’s missionary efforts. More than that, it reveals the living heart of the Church, of the Church’s life and identity, and of the Church’s mission and proclamation: *“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”* (v 2).

This is the truth. This is the message. This is the task.

This wasn’t just for Paul to get right as he wrote to the Corinthian Christians.

This is for the Church of all times and all places.

This is not simply saying “in Christ alone”. This is not simply repeating the Reformation mantra “solus Christus” (Christ alone) throughout this 500th anniversary year of the Reformation.

And this is not just talking about Jesus a great deal—which, we pray, most preachers and churches would be doing anyway. Well, yes, you must talk about Jesus Sunday after Sunday, and all the days in between, but Paul doesn’t tell us—tell you—to do this just any old way.

Instead he says, *“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*

For the cross must be at the center of our proclamation, because this is how Jesus Christ is made known. And nothing else matters or else our sin still matters.

And guilt still matters.

And shame still matters.

And separation from the holy God still matters.

And eternal damnation still matters.

But ... because of Jesus' death, as both our substitute and our sacrifice, now forgiveness matters.

Redemption matters.

Freedom in Christ matters.

Restoration to God matters.

The commercials before and during and after today's Super Bowl want us to notice and know a lot of things. Advertisers are betting millions on it!

But the contrast today is this: the cross alone—just the one message of Christ crucified—is the never-ending truth that the Church proclaims, that the Christian affirms, and that the Holy Spirit uses to redeem and rescue and restore sinners.

With Paul *I* say, with Paul *we* say: *“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria-To God alone be the Glory

Original outline written by Rev. Mark D. Barz, San Antonio, TX

Sermon Outline

“Nothing” Means Everything

1 Corinthians 2:1-12

- I. Not: Paul did *not* come proclaiming with lofty speech or wisdom.
- II. No One: *No one* comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit.
- III. Nothing: Paul decided to know *nothing* except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.