

+++ In the Name of Jesus +++

Date: 8 Feb 2026 (5th Sunday after Epiphany, series A)

Title: “Jesus Christ—Crucified”

Text: 1 Cor 2:1-12

¹ When I came to you, brothers and sisters. I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the mystery of God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written:

‘What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived’ [*Isaiah 64:3*]
—the things God has prepared for those who love him — ¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

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His comment caught me by surprise. The two of us were just getting ready to share Holy Communion, and as I was preparing the elements, I was talking a little bit about the Confession and Absolution that we were going to be using as the first part of that service. **“The goal,”** I told him, **“is not so much the confession itself, but the forgiveness (the absolution) that that confession leads to! We can never hear that good news too often, that Jesus died on the cross to pay for all of our sins.”**

That was when he gave me this zinger. **“Pastor,”** he said, **“I don’t know why we always keep talking about the cross. We all know that’s how Jesus died—and new people coming into the church don’t want to hear about any of *that*. It’s so negative—especially for young people. Why can’t we talk more about positive things instead? All we ever seem to hear about is sin and death and the cross!”**

Well: Thinking back, I *think* what I told that man, there that day, was basically what St. Paul tells us all in today’s second reading. **“Jesus Christ, and him crucified,”** is the only thing any of us Christians really *have* to talk about. (1 Cor 2:2)

When Paul said that, you see, he was thinking back on the ministry he had had with those Christians there in Corinth, during that year-and-a-half (or so) that he had been with them. (Acts 18:11) **“When I came to you,”** Paul said, **“I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the mystery of God. For I resolved to know *nothing* (while I was with you) except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”** (1-2)

Obviously, Paul didn’t mean that those were *literally* the only words that ever came out of his mouth. Nobody would have paid any attention to him at all, if he just walked around babbling, **“Jesus**

Christ was crucified! Hey, did you know that? Jesus Christ died on a cross!” And we know for a fact that plenty of people there in Corinth *did* pay attention to Paul! Some of them (granted) might have been drawn in (to some extent) by the “show” he put on. As he says in this reading, his preaching **“was not with wise and persuasive words *but* with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.”** (4) *Exactly* what that meant (or looked like), we don’t know, but the New Testament confirms in many places that the Holy Spirit *did* work with great power *not only* through Paul’s words, *but also* through his deeds.

So, maybe (from that angle)—maybe Paul *didn’t* have a whole lot more to talk about with the people who gathered around him every day, *besides* this one central topic (**“Jesus Christ, and him crucified”**). Maybe the miracles created the buzz and brought people in the door, *so* that Paul could hit them *hard* with that core Christian gospel that **“Jesus was the Christ, the anointed-one God had always been promising to send. And the greatest miracle that was part of his ministry was his resurrection, 3 days after he died on the cross to pay for all of our sins!”**

Notice, though, what *I’m* already doing, when I put it that way. I’m *expanding* my message, aren’t I, *beyond* those few little words (**“Jesus Christ, and him crucified”**). I’m doing that to help you *understand* what his crucifixion *means*. It wasn’t the only thing Jesus ever did! But, as we heard in today’s Gospel reading, Jesus did a lot of teaching too. In fact, that was *mostly* what he did, according to the Gospels! He “drew people in” with wise and challenging words that connected the never-changing truth of God’s Word with the constantly-changing world his hearers lived in. **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets,”** Jesus said; **“I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them!”** (Matt 5:17) And **“fulfil,”** in that context, meant **“making the Law and the Prophets *ful*”**—that is, pulling out of the compact little kernel of what the Scripture itself *said*, applications that made sense *in people’s lives*.

Along with his teaching, miracles were obviously important in Jesus’ ministry too. When John the Baptist was having some doubts about whether Jesus really was the Saviour, Jesus told the messengers John had sent: **“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and (yes!) good news is preached to the poor!”** (Matt 11:4-5) What was true for Paul, you see, 20 years later, was even more true for Jesus! Miracles were a way of “drawing people in” to *both* of their ministries, so that they *would* pay attention to the Word. As Paul put in our second reading, miracles were intended by God to be **“a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that people’s faith might not rest on human wisdom, but the power of God.”** (1 Cor 2:4)

And that’s what all of us really need the most, isn’t it?—the power of God. That’s true for young people too. I’ll have more to say about them in a minute, but the power of God is especially necessary for people who are *closer* to their own death (from a probability perspective, at least). As the curtains on life begin to close, and the shadow of death grows darker—people never ask me for ordinary old **“human wisdom.”** They’re not interested anymore (at that point) in finding out how to have a better life. What they want (and need!) to know is how to die—how to get ready for death, and how to be hopeful and courageous as they see death approaching.

And at times like those, **“Jesus Christ and him crucified”** *IS* our only answer. It’s not about his teachings, or his miracles, anymore at that point.

- I met a man once who had memorized the whole Sermon on the Mount (3 chapters of Matthew’s Gospel). He went around to various churches, wherever he could find an audience, *reciting* the

Sermon on the Mount, because he was so convinced that that was the most important thing Jesus gave us—that marvellous speech full of excellent moral and ethical teaching.

- I know some churches, too, where the focus is on the miracles Jesus performed—in his own earthly ministry, first of all, but then also in the early church. Based on those things that happened in the past, the people who go to those churches often pray for gifts of healing in their lives too... or wealth and prosperity... or dramatic turnarounds in their family life... or other impressive **“demonstrations of the Spirit’s power.”** (1 Cor 2:4)

Problem is, neither of those kinds of Christianity really *work* so well anymore, when death draws near. Not even the wisest moral teaching *helps* very much when life is running out. Nor does it make much sense (at a certain point) to pray for the Lord to heal a person anymore. Death *comes* for us all, as the final and unavoidable consequence (here in this world) of the fact that we are sinners. Even when our sins have all been *forgiven*—through faith in Jesus—*even then*, the harsh truth is that we *still* have to die. And that is what forces each of us to ask what we are going to *do* about death (*how* we are going to *face* it). **“Jesus Christ and him crucified”** is the answer.

The *reason* “the crucified Christ” is the answer is because he is the One who holds the keys of death and the grave. That’s the very first thing that the risen-and-ascended Lord Jesus told St. John, in the very first vision John describes in the book of Revelation. **“When I saw him,”** John says, **“I fell at his feet as though I were dead! Then he placed his right hand on me and said, ‘Do not be afraid! I am the First and the Last; I am the Living-One! I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and the grave.’”** (Rev 1:17-19)

The greatest miracle, you see, is not any of the miracles Jesus did for anybody else (long ago, or even today). The greatest miracle is the one that *was done to Jesus*, when his heavenly Father *raised* him from the dead, on Easter morning. That is the central, defining, *foundational* miracle that our Christian faith is built on! Yes, Jesus *also* taught people and performed miracles. But the reason he did those things was simply to *gather* people around and *get them ready* for *this* miracle: his death and resurrection for our salvation. That’s why Paul too taught people and performed miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit—to *gather* people around and *get them ready* for the day when they too would be *swept up in* that one, fabulous, *founding* miracle of *our Saviour’s own resurrection* from the dead.

The dying and rising of Jesus, you see, is what changes *everything* for *everyone*. That’s why Paul talks about it so much here, in this very first part of this letter. Actually, Paul *already* started talking about the dying and rising of Jesus in last week’s reading from 1 Corinthians *chapter 1*. Now, as we heard, it’s literally the only thing Paul *keeps* talking about, here in chapter 2.

For us too, the dying and rising of Jesus is our starting-point. Everything else we really want or need to talk about, as Christians, flows from there.

And make no mistake, we as Christians *do* want and need to talk about *all sorts of other things too*—building on the death and resurrection of Jesus! Paul himself doesn’t just “say Amen” and sign this letter right at the end of today’s reading. No, he *keeps writing!*—14 more chapters!—dealing with everything from ministry to marriage... immorality, to lawsuits... relating to your pagan neighbours (“out there”), and getting along with each other (in the church). Words like **“cross, crucify, and death”** hardly even show up anywhere at all, in any of those 14 chapters. Yet everything Paul says in them is *shaped* by this foundational fact right at the beginning: that Jesus *died* on the cross and *rose* from the dead *for us*.

His death, you see, is what paid for our forgiveness. And that is what enables us to face the horrifying and heartbreaking *depth* and *extent* of our sin. “Yes, we have sinned,” we confess, when we

see our sin nailed to his cross. “There’s no need anymore to cover that up, or deny it, or pretend we haven’t done it.” We can be honest about our sins, because of Christ’s cross.

His resurrection changes the way we think about the future too, by giving us *confidence* in our ability to change. Yes, we need to die—to our sin, *and* in our bodies. But death is not the end! Our Saviour’s resurrection has already opened up a new and incredibly hopeful future for the whole creation. Its *fullness* lies ahead of us, on the other side of the grave. But as Paul says in 2 Corinthians, **“If anyone is in Christ: there is the new creation”**—*right there*, already! **“The old has gone,”** Paul says; **“the new has come.”** (2 Cor 5:17)

That is why you and I not only *can* but *should* be thinking, praying, and talking about *everything* we see going on in the world around us. None of it is off-limits, because all of it has already been *changed* by “the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.” He died to pay for all of our failures, and he rose again to give us a marvellous new future.

So—just to illustrate what this new approach might look like, with a few contemporary examples:

- We can be honest about the fact that our society has gone “far too far” away from God’s design for human sexuality. We can recognize our sin, and lay it at the foot of the cross, and embrace the new beginning that the resurrection of Jesus makes possible—for each of us, and for all of us.
- We can do the same with all the problems we see in the environment. We never *intended* to dump so many chemicals, and pollutants, and climate-changing substances into the air, sea, and land, that (as Paul says) **“the whole creation is groaning, as in the pains of childbirth.”** (Rom 8:22) Obviously Paul was not talking about any of our environmental issues when he wrote those words, but I think we can apply all of this as a call to recognize and turn away from our environmental mistakes, and welcome and embrace a better future.
- More broadly still, you and I can be honest about the fact that our social discourse as a whole has been pumped so full of toxic statements and ideas, that we are all choking. Right? Let’s nail that whole sin-sick situation to our Saviour’s cross—including everything we ourselves might have said and done, to contribute to it. Instead, let us embrace the fresh and healthy approach to public conversation that Jesus had in mind in our Gospel reading, when he called us Christians **“the salt of the earth.”** Jesus was not thinking about salt, there, as *corrosive*, but rather as a *preservative!*—a substance that *stops* corruption, infection, and deterioration within our whole society.

It doesn’t matter whether we are young or old. It doesn’t matter whether we’re hearing this *cross-centred* message for the first time, or the ten-thousandth time. Always, you and I (as Christians) base our thinking about *everything*, on **“Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”** Everything else we need and want to talk about, flows from there.

As Paul readily admits, this is *not* **“the wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age.”** But it is **“a message of wisdom among the mature.”** It is **“God’s own wisdom!—a mystery that has been hidden,”** but has now been **“revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.”** (6, 7, 10)

May God grant *each* of us and *all* of us that *maturity* of mind and heart to see **“Jesus Christ, and him crucified”** as the vital core and centre of our faith—and the key that determines our approach to everything.

God grant it, for Jesus’ sake. AMEN.