2-9-20, The Holy Way

Sermon on I Corinthians 2:1—16

1. Introduction
2. Corinth
3. An important city on major trade routes
4. A city known for “anything goes.” What happened in Corinth stayed in Corinth
5. Paul had visited Corinth probably in 53, staying about 18 months while
6. Some of the people in Corinth apparently weren’t all that impressed by Paul’s preaching, apparently because it wasn’t sophisticated and philosophical enough for them.
7. This letter is the second Paul has written to the church at Corinth. After his first letter, he received a response asking him questions and describing the situation at the church. I Corinthians is Paul’s response to that letter.
8. Prayer
9. The text
10. (v. 1—5) **Paul’s time in Corinth** When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery [or it could be translated “the testimony”] of God to you in lofty words or wisdom [Paul preached in a manner that was plain and understandable].
11. (v. 2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. [The crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus are at the very core of our Christian faith.]
12. (v. 3) And I came to you in weakness and in fear and much trembling [Paul had already suffered rejection and violence from his teaching. Additionally, the challenge of establishing a community of Christian faith in Corinth was daunting.]
13. (v.4 & 5) My speech and my proclamation [Here Paul is probably talking about his manner and his content respectively] were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom [persuasive rhetoric] but on the power of God.
14. (v. 6—13) **The wisdom of people and the wisdom of God** Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom,
15. (v. 6b) though it is not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. [Notice that earlier Paul was talking about himself only. Now he switches to “we” referring to his colleagues in proclaiming Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles in the Gentile world. He is probably inviting his readers to ask themselves whether they themselves are mature.
16. (v. 7) But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden [until it is revealed in the power of the Holy Spirit], which God decreed before the ages for our glory.
17. (v. 8 & 9) None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written [what follows here appears to be a very loose translation of Isaiah 64:4], “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart [or intellect] conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.
18. (v. 10—13) These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God [those things concerning God and God’s love that are unknowable are known and revealed by the Spirit.]
19. (v. 11a) For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? [Paul is constructing a logical argument here. Only human beings (and of course God) know what it means and is to be human.]
20. (v. 11b) So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God.
21. (v. 12) Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.
22. (v. 13) And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. [The “spiritual” Paul refers to are spiritual due to the work of the Holy Spirit, not by their own wisdom or depth.]
23. (v. 14—16) Those who are unspiritual [those who have not been transformed by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit] do not receive the gifts of God’s spirit
24. (v. 14b) for they [the gifts] are foolishness to them and they are not able to understand them because they [again, the gifts] are spiritually discerned.
25. (v. 15 & 16a) For those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one’s scrutiny [God’s judgement is the only meaningful one for those in the Spirit] [This next is a quote from Isaiah 40:13] “for who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?”
26. (v. 16b) But we have the mind of Christ.
27. So, what?

You all know that I support you and encourage you to study the Bible. And I also want you to know critically important things about yourselves. One of those important things is the depth of love that God has for you. As you know, I was reared in a faith tradition in which we hoped that we would go to heaven when we died, but we could never be sure whether we had prayed enough believed enough and avoided the things that God hated like movies and playing cards and dancing. This is the way of hopelessness and despair.

So, the first thing for you to hold onto is that God already loves you. God has already saved you. Your salvation is secure. You have been set free. You are free to serve God with assurance and with extravagance.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about the Holy Spirit, because it’s such a focus of this passage. First, who is the Holy Spirit? And that’s the right question: who, not what? The Holy Spirit is a person, not an object or a thing, a person who transcends gender.

Second, the Holy Spirit is personal. When you are transformed by Jesus into one of his disciples, the Holy Spirit of God enters your life and lives within you forever. It is Spirit who comforts us, challenges us, convicts us, and cries out to God for us when all our words are gone. You are never alone, no matter the circumstances. God has chosen to be with you in the form of the Spirit, closer than breathing, for all eternity.

Do you see how incredible this is? For those of you cradle Christians who have always known that you were loved by God, this is the mechanism through which that certainty lives in you. For those of you who came to a faith in Jesus later in life, this is the mechanism through which God called you and transformed you. For those of us who were reared in Christian faith but rejected it and walked away from God, The Spirit is the mechanism through which we were brough back home.

When you are making decisions, regardless of what they are, the Spirit is with you. When you are sick, the Spirit is with you. When you are feeling broken and alone, the Spirit is with you. When you face death, the Spirit will be right with you, guiding and comforting you.

Friends, God has loved you so profoundly. May you and I know, through the ministry of the Spirit within us, the height and depth and breadth of that love. May it be so. Amen.