Look Back To the Cross

1. There you will find the power of the Holy Spirit
2. There you will find the power of God’s grace

There are some events that are so etched in our memory that we can never forget about them. Most people can remember exactly where they were or what they were doing when events like the terrorist attacks of 9/11, or the blowing up of the Challenger Space Shuttle, or maybe the death Elvis, or the bombing of Pearl Harbor, or the assignation of President Kennedy. Many of you have lived through a number of those moments and probably remember them vividly. We call them defining moments. Those are defining moments on a grand scale, affecting millions of people, affecting entire nations.

Let’s personalize this. What would be the defining moment in your life? I would have a hard time coming up with just one. I would rather do a whole bunch events because there are so many. What would be the defining moment in your life, if you were to choose one? An event that impacted you so much that it actually helped to shape who you are today? It might depend on your age or life experience. Would it be Confirmation, graduation from high school or college, your first job, your current job, marriage, divorce, the birth of a child or grandchildren, an accident? Would it be a health crisis, the death of a loved one, a move across the city, across the state, across the country, retirement? All of those could be, defining moments in our lives.

For the last two decades or so, we have had psychologists and psychiatrists and talk show hosts, pushing us to do this, to go back in our past to dig into events, especially our childhood, to find clues as to who we are and why we are the way that we are. Traumatic events are said to have an impact on us. It can seem like lives are altered, perspectives changed, and if it is a really traumatic event, maybe even hope is lost. I do not know what you had pick for that defining moment - good or bad - but no matter what it is, you did not go back far enough.

Today to find the defining moments in our lives, we need to go back before 9/11, before death of Elvis, before Pearl Harbor. We need to go back even before we were born. To find the defining moment of your life and mine, we have to go back before Luther and the Reformation, before Paul, the author of our text. We need to: Look Back To the Cross. There you will find the power of the Holy Spirit and there you will find the power of God’s grace.

Paul was writing to Christians who were rather new to the faith, mostly Gentiles, some Jews, in Corinth. Corinth was a very big, world-class city. Apart from Athens, it was the leading city in Greece for commerce and culture, but it was not all on the up and up. I am not trying to pick on this poor city, but it’s kind of like Vegas. In Vegas, you have the slogan - What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas! What happened in Corinth, stayed in Corinth. Corinth was known for its immorality and its open wickedness. Back then they even coined a word that described a pretty intense night on the town. It was said that you were going to - Go Corinthianize!

So the people of Corinth, and the new Christians there, were quite worldly. They were very impressed with the worldly wisdom, worldly things, philosophy, and they loved, we find out from Paul’s writings, to hear excellent speakers speak. Paul could do all those things. Paul had a university education at a secular university, second to none. He had the best theological education, sitting at the feet of the well known rabbi named, Gamaliel - everybody wanted to be his student. Paul had been his student. Paul was the Pharisee of the Pharisees. No one did religion, taught it, knew it, lived it, better than Paul - Saul, that is, before he became Paul. He
could communicate very clearly and powerfully. He was the **Best of the best!**

But, when he got to Corinth on his first visit to preach the gospel and to establish a church, he says: **As for me, brothers, when I came to you, I did not come with superior speech or wisdom in order to proclaim to you the testimony of God. For I had no intention of knowing anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness, in fear, and with much trembling.** Weakness and fear? Trembling? The great apostle Paul?

Before he came to Corinth, he had passed through Athens, and in Acts 17, we learn that Paul did not have a very good experience in Athens. He was in the market place, in an open public area and he noticed that there were altars to all the different gods that the Greeks had, and the Greeks were very practical philosophical people. They did not want to miss out on any gods or offend any, so they had this altar to an unknown god. Now if you were a god and the Greeks had not acknowledged you, that would cover it for you, right? You would be OK with being the unknown god. It did not make sense. So Paul tackled that. He tried to reason with them. He said: **I want to tell you about this unknown god,** but he did not get a chance to finish the full message of Christianity. He left. He felt that his time there was a failure.

So the apostle went to the next big town, world-class city, filled with smart and sophisticated people. They loved commerce, culture, debates, and they loved excellent public speakers. So when he came to Corinth, Paul put aside eloquence, word-play, super creativity. He put aside superior, worldly wisdom. He set aside showmanship and he kept it simple. Christ crucified! Christ on the cross! Christ and nothing else!

Now simple to the world means stupid. It means foolish. It means do not waste your time. However, simple in the kingdom of God is true wisdom and true power because, as Paul writes in this same letter: **The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.** And so Paul had success in Corinth. My message and my preaching were not marked by persuasive words of human wisdom, but by a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

Now about that defining moment for you and me. Think about the past week of your life. We are going to focus on some specific incidents. They are going to be different for each one of us, but the results are the same. We are talking about sin, in thought, word and deed, over the past week, the past day, even the past hour. Picture a pile of books as the burden of sin. Sins seem so small when we do them. What or whom is really hurt?

So, this past week, have hurt anyone with your words or actions? Put a book on pile. Ever lied to anyone? Put another book. Have you treated anyone disrespectfully? Add another book. Refused to forgive anyone, for any reason this week? Another book. Have you indulged in gossip or giving it? Another book. Have you gotten into an argument with anyone? Another book. Been impatient with anybody? Another book. Have you gotten angry with anybody? Another book. We would run out books and the strength to hold the books if we kept going, wouldn’t we? How long do you think we can hold this **stack** of sin? The point is - nobody can carry the burden of sin. This does not even begin to picture the enormity of the debt on our sins. The enormity of the debt, not that we incur collectively, but that I incur, that you incur, individually. Sin crushes us! It dooms us! It damn us!

Now, if the way to heaven is - Christ plus something. Christ plus anything at all, well
then, we are not going to make it! There is no way to heaven by ourselves doing something to help God. There is no way to get there, if it is Christ plus something.

If the way to heaven is Christ alone - Christ crucified and nothing else - well then, it is wide open because of his perfect, sinless, righteous life, lived on our behalf, lived in our place. His innocent suffering and death on the cross paid the price for the sins of the world. There we see my sins washed away in the precious stream of his blood that was shed on the cross of Calvary. Then his wonderful Easter morning guarantee of an empty tomb. Christ died for sins, once for all, when he offered himself. Once for all, for all time. Once for you, once for me.

And so the defining moment in your life is actually the same as mine. The defining moment in our lives is not some wonderful milestone that we might have achieved or accomplished or reached simply by virtue of age. Nor is the defining moment in your life a traumatic experience, a circumstance that might have happened years ago. The defining moment in your life - and I really want you to apply this to yourself - if you forget everything else this day, this is what you need to remember. The defining moment in your life and mine, took place just over 2000 years ago on the cross when Christ proclaimed to the world and you and me: **It is finished.** If anything is going to shape you, define you, mold you, impact you, make you into the person that you are to be, it is this - Christ on the cross. So in this regard, in regard to your spiritual life, resolve to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Then your faith rests, not on man's wisdom, not on creative preaching, but on Christ and the cross. Christ alone.

As Christians we like to live for the future. We are always looking ahead. We awake each day knowing that bountiful blessings will over-flow from our heavenly Father. We look forward to the eternal day of everlasting life. We do not like to look in the past as God's people because we know that if we look in our past, we will see sin and failure and devastation. But we need to do this one thing and really, we needs to be, for lack of a better word, a habit. It needs to be something that we continually and constantly do.

Look back to the cross and know that what happened on the cross covers all that sin and failure and devastation. Because when we look back at the cross, we see where we have come from and not that we had anything to do with it. It is what God has given us in Christ through his sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. Knowing where we came from, helps us to know where we are going. So look to the cross and live. Amen.

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