

**“The Hinge of History”**  
**1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

Christian author, Max Lucado, in his book, *God Came Near*, describes the dialogue which took place between Christian lecturer, Landon Sanders, and a young university student. After the completion of Sanders’ lecture, the young man had a lot of questions.

“You mean to tell me God became a baby?...”

The young man posing the question was puzzled. His thick eyebrows furrowed in doubt and his eyes squinted in caution. Though there were places to sit, he opted not to do so. He preferred to stand safely behind the crowd, unsure, yet intrigued by what he was hearing. Throughout the lecture he had listened intently.

“You mean to tell me that God became a baby – and that he was born in a sheep stable?”

“Yes, that’s what I mean to say,” the lecturer responded.

“And then, after becoming a baby, he was raised in a blue-collar home? He never wrote any books or held any offices, yet he called himself the Son of God?”

“That is right.”

“He never traveled outside of his own country, never studied at a university, never lived in a palace, and yet asked to be regarded as the creator of the universe?”

“That’s correct.”

“And this crucifixion story...he was betrayed by his own people? No followers came to his defense? And then he was executed like a common junkyard thief?”

“That’s the gist of it.”

“And after the killing he was buried in a borrowed grave?”

“Yes, he had no grave of his own, nor money with which to purchase one.”

“And according to what’s written, after three days in the grave he was resurrected and made appearances to over five hundred people?”

“Yes.”

“And all this was to prove that God still loves his people and provides a way for us to return to him.”

“Right.”

The honesty of the dialogue kept the audience spellbound. But, the young questioner had one final piercing question.

“Doesn’t that all sound rather…” He paused a second, searching for the right adjective. “Doesn’t that all sound rather absurd?”

All heads in the audience turned in perfect sync and looked to the lecturer.

“Yes, yes. I suppose it does sound absurd, doesn’t it?” (1)

Our text for this evening is 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Our text invites us to consider the wonder and the mystery, and yes, what some have considered the foolishness and absurdity of God in human flesh – crucified to accomplish our salvation. Let’s listen now for God’s word for us tonight.

The young skeptic who dialoged with Landon Sanders was certainly not the first person to consider Christ’s death on the cross as absurd, foolish or even scandalous. In our text for this evening, the Apostle Paul was writing to a group of young Christians surrounded on all sides by those who viewed the cross as foolish and even scandalous.

For the Gentiles of Paul’s day, it was absolutely foolish to think that God would become a human being. It was even greater foolishness, in fact, an offense, to claim that

God not only became a human being, but suffered and died. God cannot suffer, the wise all agreed. The notion was completely offensive to Greek sensibilities.

For the Romans, crucifixion was the ultimate penalty, reserved for murderers, insurrectionists and slaves. Roman citizens, if sentenced to death for a crime, were beheaded, not crucified. Author Philip Yancey has observed, “The Romans, bred on power deities like Jupiter, could recognize little godlikeness in a crumpled corpse hanging on a tree.” The notion was absurd to the Romans.

For the Jews, the cross was utterly offensive. Crucifixion was not utilized by the Jews as a form of capital punishment. However, Jews did after stoning blasphemers or idolaters, sometimes hung them for their offenses, reflecting their understanding from Deuteronomy that “...anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (21:23).

Clearly, it was incredible to the Jews that one whose life was ended in scandal on a cross could possibly be God’s chosen One – the long-awaited deliverer – the Messiah.

Gentiles, Romans, Jews and many others, including the young skeptic who dialoged with Landon Sanders, have struggled to make sense of the cross. Noted New Testament scholar, Gordon Fee, accurately summarizes this struggle. He says, “No human in his or her right mind would ever have dreamed up God’s scheme for redemption – through a crucified Messiah.” Fee goes on to say, “Had God consulted us for wisdom we could have given him a more workable plan...But, as it is, in his own wisdom he left us out of the consultation.”

Perhaps if God had consulted us, we could have devised another way...a way to avoid the shame, the humiliation, the sheer brutality of the cross, and still accomplish our redemption.

As appealing as the notion may sound, author William Willimon wisely observes, “If we or the world could be saved through human kindness or clear thinking, Jesus either would have formed a sensitivity group and urged us to share our feelings or would have founded a school and asked us to have discussions. But knowing the ways of God, the way of the world, and the persistence of human sin, Jesus took up the cross...”

Jesus took up the cross and accomplished for us what we could not accomplish for ourselves...the ultimate healing of our sin-sick souls.

Some think that the notion is absurd...our healing accomplished through a cross. Can't humanity heal itself? Last year, Yoko Ono, the widow of rock star John Lennon, took out a full-page ad in the New York Times calling for December 8 – the anniversary of Lennon's death – to be made a global day of healing. In calling for this global day of healing, Ono promised, “One day we will be able to say that we healed ourselves, and by healing ourselves, we healed the world.”

With all due respect, as Christians on this Good Friday evening of 2007, we understand that our global day of healing has already occurred. Our healing was accomplished not with human good intentions or a full-page ad in the New York Times, but by Christ's death on a cross – for us and for our salvation.

Every Sunday during this season of Lent, we have boldly proclaimed, as our words of forgiveness, our understanding of our healing and how it was accomplished. “But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

A favorite African-American spiritual so eloquently echoes our understanding of what Christ has accomplished on our behalf. “There is a balm in Gilead to make the

wounded whole. There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.” Friends, there is a balm which heals us...and that balm is not human kindness, good intentions or clear thinking...that balm is Christ, crucified for us and for our salvation.

In another of his books, simply entitled, *The Cross*, Christian author Max Lucado describes the pivotal nature of the cross in history and in each of our lives with these words,

(The cross) ...rests on the time-line of history like a compelling diamond. Its tragedy summons all sufferers. Its absurdity attracts all cynics. Its hope allures all searchers. History has idolized and despised it, gold-plated and burned it, worn and trashed it. History has done everything but ignore it. How could you ignore such a piece of lumber? Suspended on its beams is the greatest claim in history. A crucified carpenter claiming to be God on earth. Divine. Eternal. The death-slayer. Never has timber been regarded so sacred. No wonder the apostle Paul called the cross event the core of the gospel. It's bottom line sobering: if the account is true, it is history's hinge.

On this Good Friday evening, as we gather in this place, we are bold to declare that the cross of Christ is indeed history's hinge and healing balm for our sin-sick souls. It may seem absurd to some, but not to us. We do not claim to understand the cross. Who could understand the love of a God who became earth's mockery to save his children? Love so amazing, so divine; who could understand it? Perhaps our greatest need tonight is not to understand it, but to receive it. May it be so that all honor and glory may be given to the One who has been revealed to us as Maker, Redeemer and Friend. Amen.

- Robin Garvin  
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