

Whoever Wants to Follow Jesus Needs the Right Footwear

Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Trinity Sunday

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 – The Word of the Cross as the Wisdom and Power of God



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For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

At that time, Jesus walked in Israel from one city to another proclaiming the nearness of the Gospel and the kindness of God. Behind Him were always so many people who followed Him. We can still always follow Jesus today. The question is this, what footwear does one need to follow after Jesus. I don't think that we have to buy a pair of sandals from the 1st century so that we are true Christians. Rather we need the right pair of shoes fit with Jesus' personality and character. You all know how it is if you wear the wrong shoes. Imagine for example the soccer player would go to the European championship games

with ballerina shoes. Then they would be hopelessly lost. Or imagine a ballerina dancing in soccer shoes. She would also be completely lost. And just as footwear is important in sports or for a ballerina, so too are the tools that we need in following Jesus. It's interesting that in following Christ, people always so stubbornly want to wear the wrong shoes. And because of this, they very quickly fall to the wayside in following Christ. Just like soccer player with ballet shoes. Paul talks about these incorrect shoes in the first letter to the Corinthians. At that time, wisdom was like a really good pair of shoes for the Corinthians. That's why they wanted to solve everything with this wisdom and thought that there was nothing better than wisdom. Human wisdom is actually something good. We can do a lot with it. We can invent or calculate things. But in following Jesus, wisdom is no good. In following Jesus, human wisdom is as useless as ballet shoes are useless for a soccer player. But the Corinthians at that time wanted to use this wisdom in following Jesus. They thought that they could know everything about God with their wisdom. The problem with such people like the Corinthians is that they were convinced that they were right, even when they were completely wrong. I think we should pause shortly at this spot and ask ourselves the question whether or not we also make the same mistake as the Corinthians. Can it be that we place ourselves and our understanding above even God? Are we not perhaps also like the Corinthians and made a picture of God for ourselves that is absolutely not true? We have cobbled together a God who is always by our side and always against our enemies. No matter what we do, God must always be there to justify our deeds no matter how wrong they are. In the Bible it is confirmed that we humans are not God. We also don't have God's understanding. Not only can we not understand God, we continuously understand Him completely incorrectly too. The fact that we humans are all sinners basically makes the mind incapable of understanding God. Even if we mean to do everything correctly. For God and consequently for following Jesus, reason remains the wrong footwear and despite all the sadness about this fact, we have to bite our lips very hard and lay aside the footwear! Paul says, God has ruined the comprehension of the understanding! Whoever also tries to understand Jesus and His coming to earth with reason is at the wrong place with the wrong shoes!

Where reason doesn't work, you can also try power. Many others have tried to use such power methods. There's a game on the computer where you can try out the instrument of power. In this game, the computer player can create entire worlds and populate it. He can bless the one group of people and let the other people plummet into a terrible war or into a natural catastrophe. The appeal of this game is that the player suddenly has absolute control in his little world in front of the computer. Here, he or she can suddenly rule everything. Here I have the power to decide and can do whatever I want. Conservative people who otherwise have so little play in life, amuse themselves wonderfully in this game where they can finally be in control. But the game remains a game and is an illusion. Many a person thinks that one can also understand faith like such a game. After Jesus had healed many people. After He had performed great miracles, after He also had laid out quite bluntly the Scripture in authority and wisdom, several always came to Him and said: "give us a sign!" These people wanted just that. They ultimately wanted to demonstrate faith with clear, visible signs and wonders as proof that God is there. Before such a power, everyone must surrender. There is no more discussion or questions. In view of power over the world and nature, we have no choice but to concede to the One who has power over nature. But that isn't faith. That is surrender to the stronger ones. We must stand before God without proof. We can't see God! We also can't prove that He's there. Not with scientific evidence nor with some other things. Before every war, before everything that somehow goes wrong, we must always falter before this question: What does God mean by this? And where does God work in our world. And yet we remain here without an answer. Again and again there were people who tried to put themselves

in the place of God. Again and again people tried to manipulate or control others by bringing God into play. Unfortunately, there is a terrible trail of blood in the history of the world. No, power doesn't work. It is simply the wrong pair of shoes. That's not how we get close to God.

Contrary to this error, to understand God with reason. Contrary to the error of mistaking God with power and trying out power over others, Paul wants to show us a completely different pair of shoes in the first letter to the Corinthians. There it's about the crucified one. That means the one who surrendered all power. As the letter to the Philippians says. He who had all the power of God but removed Himself and became a person like us and humbled Himself to the cross. And when Jesus humbled Himself on the cross, He showed in an impressive way that our understanding also failed on the cross. Because who can already grasp with understanding that the almighty God let Himself be crucified by people? And who can already grasp that God wants to save all the people of the world in this way. Who can already understand that the cross is the great declaration of love of our God? Dear congregation, the cross is understood neither with reason nor with power nor with any other such means. Only faith can wonderingly approach the cross. And whoever understands the cross with faith says like Paul: that he wants to know nothing else but the Crucified One. It may be that I can spot the footprints of God in many aspects of my life. For example, through the life and the nature He has given us. Ultimately, my faith doesn't originate or come from nature but only from the Crucified One. But do we know what that means? We have a cross all over as a Christian symbol. But are we also aware of the offense of the cross? We have two things before our eyes with the cross: on the one side an awful instrument of torture and on the other side the living God who is over everything. What a paradox! Look at the cross. There you see that happens when the creator God comes on earth!

Then God's love did its very last – He sacrificed Himself. And that is the right pair of shoes to follow after Jesus. Wisdom can spray us, power bends our knees. But the cross reaches our hearts so that we want to follow in the steps of Jesus all on our own. Why? Because He loves us. And because that is so visible and clear on the cross, that's why we can do it with pleasure. In view of the cross, I can breathe; I can also lay aside all the unfortunate web of guilt and shame. In view of the cross, I can believe that the almighty God has conquered my heart. Amen.