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1 Corinthians 1:18

Christcross Series: "God's Power At Work"

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Our sermon series for Lent this year at Hope begins today. This series has a funny name. "Christcross" is an old-fashioned, *Olde English* word. "Christcross" means "the figure or mark of a cross." What kind of a mark, what kind of an impression, has the cross of Christ made on your life?

We see the cross up there when we come to church. And there are crosses all over this room, this building. But does the cross of our Lord really make an impact on our lifestyle, on our families? Has it left a mark on your relationships, on your values and belief system? What is the "Christcross," the mark of the cross, on your life? Let's talk about it together, and sort it out, over these next weeks.

Start with this question. Have you ever thought about how strange a symbol the cross is? Back in Jesus' day, a cross wasn't something religious at all. A cross was an executioner's device, a capital punishment tool. The government used crosses to put the very worst condemned criminals to death in the most painful, awful way.

Imagine, in modern times, a hangman's noose, or an electric chair, as the chosen symbol of our faith. How weird would that be! And yet the cross, the very piece of equipment used to inflict the death sentence on convicted criminals, is what we use as our symbol, our brand. It's pretty odd, isn't it?

Some might even call it folly, foolishness, nonsense. Not everybody gets the cross. Not everybody buys into the message of the cross of Jesus. How can an instrument of death convey life? How can a Son of God allow himself to be defeated by his enemies? How can we see victory and honor

in a tragic, cruel, torturous, barbaric death by crucifixion? How can we Christians worship a God who dies such an ugly death? Doesn't the cross demonstrate weakness? Isn't God supposed to be powerful? Isn't the message of the cross, then, folly? Some have always thought so.

Archaeologists working in Rome discovered, in 1857, an ancient piece of graffiti. Carved into plaster, this old, faded design features two figures and several Greek letters. Here's a tracing of this graffiti. On the left is a man lifting up a hand in worship or prayer. On the right is a second man up on a cross. This figure is unusual, though. He has the body of a man, but the head of a donkey. The inscription says, "*Alexamenos sebetai theon*," "Alexamenos worships his God."

Scholars date this graffiti to approximately 200 A.D.. It's probably the oldest known picture of Jesus on the cross. But it's not a devotional piece of art at all. This graffiti is a mockery of Alexamenos, an ancient Christian, and a mockery of a God who would die the shameful death of a criminal.

The message of the cross didn't make sense to that artist. And the cross is folly to many of our contemporaries, too, our countrymen and our neighbors.

1 Corinthians 1:18 says it, reading from the CEV, "The message of the cross doesn't make any sense to lost people. But for those of us who are being saved, it is God's power at work in us."

Did you get the point of that children's message earlier? Sometimes things that seem weak can be really strong. Sometimes God uses weak, weird, totally unexpected things -- like a cross, or like a person -- to make powerful, amazing things happen.

For people of faith, we can look at Jesus on the cross and see God's power at work – the power to forgive, the power to save. We can look at Alexamenos' God, and see not a disastrous failure, but a triumphant victory taking place. The cross was God's way of paying himself the price for our sins. The cross was Jesus giving his divine, perfect life, out of love for sinful humans like us.

The cross is really the ultimate expression, isn't it, of God's love for people like us? We're the ones who are weak, not him. We're the ones who are damaged, and doomed, and deserving of punishment. But on the cross we see how much God loves us. He sent his Son to die in our place, to forgive our sins, and to save us.

What mark does the cross make on your life?

As Christians, we need to know about forgiveness and salvation through the cross. But we need to learn, also, how God's power is always at work in our lives.

We think we're alone sometimes, and we wonder if God really cares. We feel like the world is out of control sometimes, and we wonder if God's power still holds sway. We lose hope, we give in to despair, we weaken. We get tired of battling and fighting and slugging our way through one exhausting tribulation after another.

And sometimes we forget that it's not just us going it alone. Sometimes we forget that the everlasting God is on our side! The omnipotent Lord is watching over us. The mighty King is ruling over us, and over our world. And God's power isn't always seen in miracles, and overt exhibitions of muscle power. Often God chooses to put his power to work in the weak. He uses what seems to be frail and insignificant. He works through foolish and nonsensical circumstances, or

foolish and nonsensical people, to make his plans and purposes come to life.

We see this great truth most clearly when we focus on the cross. And that's why this Christcross series is so important. We focus on the cross in Lent, because we need its message throughout the year.

With faith in Jesus -- with a humble, thankful, childlike trust in our crucified Savior -- we can see God's power at work in our lives, too, in our families, in our church. We can live as his faithful people, marked with his cross, empowered by his saving love. God grant this to us all, in the name of Jesus. Amen.



