

**REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2011: EVENING SERVICE**

**Sing before:** Hymn 16-1:1+2.

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

**Amen**

Beloved, grace and peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the powerful working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Song of praise: Psalm 111:1+2.

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

**Amen**

Hymn: 15-2:1+2.

**Scripture reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:18 to 2:5 and Heidelberg Catechism Lord's day 31:84.

**Scripture text:** 1 Corinthians 1:23-24:

*But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Heidelberg Catechism:

**Question 84:** How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the Holy Gospel?

**Answer:** In this way: that according to the command of Christ, it is proclaimed and openly witnessed to believers, one and all, that as often as they accept with true faith the promise of the Gospel, all their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits, and on the contrary, to all unbelievers and hypocrites, that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation abide on them, so long as they are not converted; according to which witness of the Gospel, will be the judgment of God both in this life and in that which is to come.(a)

(a) Matthew 16:19; John 3:31-36; 20:21-23.

Theme: **The crucified Christ is the power and wisdom of God!**

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, it has been said that, as a form of communication, preaching is one of the poorest ways of doing so. Apparently people today are no longer able to listen attentively for a long period to the voice of one speaker. To some people it is boring to listen to a sermon. They have become so used to the continual flashing pictures on the television that they can hardly listen to a sermon unless it is accompanied by pictures – so they say. I do not wish to say that the use of Power Point slides when preaching is a sin. During Bible study we use them to enhance our study and it works. Neither do I advocate putting up a screen in church for the showing of slides during a sermon.

The point I wish to make is that the objections raised are not about the sermon as a way of communicating, no, that is only a way of getting at the contents of the sermon. About Jesus as the Christ, and Him crucified, that, the people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century no longer wish to hear. Rather discuss issues concerning society. And human rights have made people so sensitive that they would rather not hear of cruel things such as crucifixion and sin. The content of the preaching must suit the fashion of our time, it is said, if not, the days of the church are numbered.

Unfortunately it is so that churches take fright at these empty threats emanating from various places and do adjust the content of their preaching. These adjustments have dire consequences. When Christ and Him crucified, is no longer preached, the Bible as the true Word of God, is also nullified. Eventually those churches who believed these empty threats disappear from the face of the earth. However sad it might be when a church dies because of this, it is only a confirmation that the Word of the Lord is true. The Lord does not allow Himself to be trifled with. Indeed, Christ warned His church in Ephesus when He said: **“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”** (Revelation 2:4-5) Today there no longer is a church in Ephesus.

Beloved, this resistance against the proclaiming of Jesus as the Christ and Him crucified, is nothing new. As from the inception of the New Testamentary church there was resistance. We read in Acts how the apostles were thrown into jail and prohibited from preaching in the Name of Jesus. And when this did not have the desired effect, the faithful were persecuted and killed because they preached Jesus Christ as the Saviour.

On his missionary travels the apostle Paul again and again met with this resistance. But because he was compelled and carried by the Spirit of our almighty Father he continued. The proclaiming of Jesus Christ as our only Redeemer is the only key which can unlock the door to the kingdom of heaven to people. Christ Himself gave this key to the apostles and His church. Through the church the whole world must hear that the kingdom of heaven, the door to God’s Father-heart, is unlocked. Again and again it is said in the passage we have read that the gospel of the cross of Christ is the power of God for those who are saved.

And is the cross of Christ not a power? With the preaching of the holy gospel the Holy Spirit confronts the believers. When the Holy Spirit by way of the holy gospel confronts man with the holy God of heaven and earth, He opens our eyes to see ourselves as the Lord God sees us. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit we, ourselves, begin to remove the screens behind which we thought that we could hide our sins. Believers then come to acknowledge how horrible their lives really are.

In their own eyes they were not so bad at all. In the eyes of men they appeared quite acceptable. But when the scales fall from their eyes and the searching light of the holy gospel illuminates every dark corner of their hearts and souls, then they see all the heinous sins in their lives.

The Holy Spirit does not do this only for the sake of seeing how mankind softens up under His almighty and the all-seeing eyes of the heavenly Father. When the Holy Spirit opens mankind's eyes to see how damnably sinful he and she is, it is not His purpose to humiliate and deride. His only purpose is to bring mankind to the cross of Christ.

It is at the cross of Christ that the Holy Spirit tells the person who is lost in sin: this blood that Christ shed on the cross is the key that unlocks the kingdom of God for you too. Believing brother, sister and child, when you confess your guilt and pray for forgiveness because you know and trust that on the cross Christ redeemed your debt also, the kingdom of God is unlocked for you by the preaching.

How great is the power of Christ's cross? It is so great that by means of faith we are with the cross of Christ released from the suction of our sins to enter, free from sin, the kingdom of God. And that great power of Christ's cross does not fling us down to the ground and shake the earth. Quietly, soundlessly, the Holy Spirit breaks the chains of sin from us with the blood of Christ when we hear the preaching of the holy gospel. And, when we in true faith, accept this promise of forgiveness of sin, the doors to God's Father-heart swing open for us.

Day by day this great power of Christ's cross ministers where the gospel is preached collectively and singly. Day by day this key unlocks with the blood of Christ the kingdom of heaven for the believers. Blessed are the people for whom the kingdom is unlocked like this by way of the preaching. For, there are no words more beautiful, than to hear from the mouth of the Lord Himself that your sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ's merits.

In Corinth this power of Christ's cross had its effect also. There were believers who could be certain that their faith was founded on the power of God. But there were other people too – unbelievers and hypocrites. To some of them Christ's cross was a stumbling-block and to others it was foolishness.

The crucified Christ who was proclaimed in Corinth, was a stumbling-block to the Jews. Arguing from their human wisdom the Jews concluded that the message that one could only be saved by the crucified Christ was an ignominy. They knew the Old Testament well. And they knew that everyone who was hanged from a tree was cursed by God. And they asked themselves the question: How could the all-conquering Messiah whom they awaited end his life dying on a tree? To them Jesus' death on the cross was the perfect proof that He could not be the Messiah. That was an infamy.

The sign the Jews had sought, namely, that Christ should save Himself from the cross, they did not get. The salvation that Christ merited on the cross was not for Himself, but for the world. And when the Jews eventually received the sign that Christ Himself gave them, namely the sign of Jonah, they refused to believe it. They denounced the disciples as liars because they said that Christ had arisen from the dead after three days.

Beloved, it is not only to the wisdom of the Jews that the preaching of the crucified Christ is a stumbling block. Today there still are people who consider it horrible. They say: How can God allow His only Son, who is without sin, to die so cruelly and mercilessly for the sins of men? To these people the preaching of Christ's death on the cross is too harsh and cruel. But if one listens more carefully to what they say, the real reason why they do not wish to hear of the gospel of the cross appears to be that they are unwilling to face their own sinfulness and to admit that they are on the wrong road.

To the Greeks of that time, the message of the crucified Christ who had arisen from the dead, was a foolish tale. According to the Greek wisdom man's body was something to be used up in this life and did not have

any real value. To them only the soul of man had any meaning because only the soul could live on after death. The body is buried after death and decomposes in the earth.

Shortly before preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in Corinth, Paul preached the gospel to a number of philosophers in the Areopagus in Athens. All went well until Paul said that Jesus had arisen from the dead and that He would return to judge the world. When those philosophers heard of the resurrection some of them sneered and walked away. To those people the message of the cross of Christ was foolishness. It is foolishness to them, says Paul, because they are lost.

Nowadays we hear people speaking a wisdom that reminds us of the Greek wisdom of those days. The people who with their human logic argue about creation and whether in the beginning only one man and one woman were created, they argue about the crossing through the Red Sea and everything. And when one listens closely to these arguments of human wisdom it appears that sooner or later they arrive at Christ. These people then doubt the immaculate conception of Jesus. They argue that Jesus is not really the Son of God and therefore He is not God. To them the resurrection from the dead is a complete impossibility. Of them we are also compelled to say that the message of the cross of Christ is foolishness because they are unable to fathom it with their puny minds.

Brothers, sisters and children, these arguments of people who depict the cross of Christ as something horrible and consider Christ's resurrection from the dead as foolishness, are only smoke screens. People who busy themselves with these arguments cannot bear to be confronted by the holy God in their sinful perdition by the Holy Spirit. They simply refuse to turn away from their sins. Let you and I scrutinise our own lives. If these or similar arguments arise in us we must know that the wrath of God and eternal damnation are on us as long as we fail to repent our sins. And as long as we do not convert we shall not hear those beautiful words that our sins are forgiven and that the kingdom is unlocked for us.

In His goodness God decided to save through the preaching, which is foolishness to the world, those who believe. Human wisdom and power are unforgiving. The Lord did not create us all with the same level of intelligence. And if one's salvation depended upon one's power or intelligence as the Jews and the Greeks believed, then only the strongest and the most intelligent would survive. But that is the Law of Nature. The Lord our God uses belief in Christ to save people.

And He gives it to everyone He chose, irrespective of intellectual capacity. For true faith is to trust like a child that everything that the Lord reveals us is true and that it is undoubtedly intended for us.

Beloved, let us all pray and fight together that the Holy Spirit keep us to the truth of God's Word. Pray and fight that the truth of the cross of Christ be proclaimed undiluted in this church of our Lord during public worship, at family visits and in the catechism. Indeed, the pure preaching of the gospel is one of the marks of the true church. I am convinced that you, as keenly as I, want our church to remain a true church of the Lord until the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen!

Closing prayer.

Closing song: Hymn 17-2:1+2+3+4.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

**Amen**

**Rev CCA Vrey**  
**Reformed Church Bellville**  
**18 September 2011**  
**Scripture: New International Version**