

## **“A Stumbling Block for Others Lifts You Up”**

### **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Football season is back in full swing. For the next 5 months, those who are fans will be glued to the TV almost every day of the week watching their favorite (or even their least favorite) team contend for a victory. And some watch just for the joy of hearing passionate people call the game, which some do much better than others. One of the most iconic sportscasters of recent memory is a guy named Chris Berman, otherwise known as “Boomer” or “The Swami.” One of his signature catchphrases popped into mind as I was preparing for the sermon this week. As a player would be running down the field, if he was unbalanced or dodging other players, Chris would employ his trademark, “Rumblin’, bumblin’, stumblin’!” The point being that the player, despite his stumbles and imbalance, was still pressing on toward the endzone, focused on completing his task no matter how shaky he might be.

Our text this morning from our Epistle lesson highlights what the cross of Christ means for all those in the world. On this Holy Cross Festival Day, we celebrate and acknowledge the truth of what the cross means for the Christian. What it means for you is salvation. It means truth and life, grace and mercy, and eternal inheritance. What it means for the false believer or non-believer is a stumbling block, a rock of offense, and folly. The difference between the cross for you and for them is that the cross does not make you stumble. That which is a stumbling block for others lifts you up. It keeps you in the grace of Your Lord, Jesus Christ, who bore your stumbling and weakness to the cross to take them upon Himself as He was lifted up for the sins of the whole world. For those who do not have the true faith, the cross shows them the reality of their eternal death, one which they cannot escape of their own free will.

It’s not all that surprising to know that the world despises the cross of Christ. We live in a world of “manifesting” and “speaking it into existence” and all the other self-serving platitudes that float around out there. The cross of Jesus is all about what He has done, and so the world trips over it as they focus on their own actions and their own well-being. The non-believer’s incessant need to make themselves the focal point of everything makes them blind to the gift of grace that emanates from the cross. Their egos have grown so large that they can’t see the truth, and most don’t want to see it. Humility would go a long way for these people, but humility (true humility) is a gift from God that comes by faith.

They are stuck in their pride, believing themselves to be the only higher power that they need in this life. As it says in James 4:6, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Their rejection of the joy of the cross is what keeps them in darkness. They are right about one thing. It is their own doing that prevails for them, but not in the way they hope it would. Only by their choice to live outside of God’s grace are they among those who can only stare upon the cross in fear. Because fear is a necessary response to the wrath of God, and that is what awaits those people. They despise Jesus and His work, because it is not their work. Out of their great desire to elevate themselves, they stumble over the cross of Christ as they fail to receive the blessed gifts that flow from His great sacrifice.

And therein lies your Christian advantage in this world. All the follies of the world are nothing before the cross, but the cross is folly before all their things of this world. All we can do is pity those people. Their entire reliance is centered in the things of this world that will pass away, but even as heaven and earth pass away, the Word of Jesus will never pass away (Luke 21:33). They see delusions and insanity, while you see the way, the truth, and the life. You see the salvation of mankind. You see the blood shed for you, the body given for you, and the water and the blood which flow from His riven side. For at Calvary, it is as John says in his first Epistle (5:7-12):

For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that He has borne concerning His Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning His Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

In the cross of Christ, you have life and salvation, and that is true because God Himself has declared it to be so. He has glorified His Son in lifting Him up as the Passover Lamb to be the all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of mankind. The Father speaks to you in His Word the same way His voice thundered from the heavens in our Gospel lesson this morning. That is the comfort and assurance of you have that the cross of Jesus lifts you up out of destitution and sinful filth. Because the words He speaks are just as Jesus says, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine (John 12:30).”

The thundering voice of your heavenly Father comes to you every time you read the Scripture, every time you hear the Gospel preached in its truth and purity, and every

time you come before Him to receive His divine service in the very body and blood of His only begotten Son. No one who has the true faith need despair of their status before God. You are His adopted sons, given the gift of faith that so many despise and reject. Wear your faith in Christ with pride, but not sinful pride that puffs you up in self-righteousness, but in the way that proclaims your faith in the One who has given you everything that you might live with Him in everlasting glory. There are so many, as we discussed last week, who walk this life wandering in a sinful cloud of confusion. The ones you love, and especially your enemies, need to hear about the love of God in Christ Jesus, lest they stumble over the cross of Christ and stand as those who are perishing because they see folly in the cross.

When you live a life for Christ by word and deed, you are living out your justification. Your faith is living and active, preaching Christ crucified in what you show to the rest of the world. There is the witness that turns a stumbling block into a boat that will carry someone through the rough waters of the flood of sin. The baptismal boat which Jesus has built for all mankind is ready to pull them in, and that pulling happens by the work of the Spirit in their hearts, which He effects by means of you as His servants. Jesus' cross is for all people, and He died upon it that all men would be saved. And yet, sin reigns in the world. The devil and his minions are hard at work in the hearts of men and battling the angels for the care of your soul. But we do not fear the evil one. His power is a worldly power that cannot corrupt the Son of God. No matter his efforts, the cross of Jesus stands as the proof that death has been defeated, because He left that cross and was raised on the third day, that you might also be raised in a resurrection like His.

Stumbling is going to happen in this life of sin, but the stumbles of the believer are not caused by the cross of Christ. They are caused by the world around you trying with all its might to upend you as you press on toward victory. The “rumblin’, bumblin’, stumblin’” of the Christian life is what it means to bear your cross and follow Jesus. Everything you do in this life is for that purpose—to prepare you for your eternal home that awaits you in the Father’s house. That’s what Paul says in Philippians 1:20-21, “...as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” No matter how many times you falter, the goal remains the same. And every time you face a stumbling block in life, the cross of your Lord and Savior is there to lift you up and carry you through. Because He was lifted up on that accursed tree, you are redeemed and you are His. You are alive in Christ Jesus, who dwells within you by virtue of your baptism into His death.

Stumbling over the cross of Christ is not your concern. Proclaiming the cross of Christ is your concern. For “we preach Christ crucified,” and as such the cross is not a pitfall, but a symbol of victory over sin, death, and the devil. Live on in the hope of what is to come, knowing indeed that it is far better to be with Christ. But it may be more necessary for you to remain, to bear the cross a bit longer as the Lord fulfills His will through you. Present the cross of Jesus before all by your words, actions, and living your faith. Bring the good news of victory in the cross of Christ to all, and pray that they would have ears to hear. There on that tree, Jesus bled and died for the benefit of all mankind, even those who stumble over his cross and are lost. Let it not be a stumbling block or folly to others. Show them that it too can lift them up into the grace of God in Christ Jesus. By His blood, all stand redeemed, and by His blood His holy people will stand in His presence when they pass into glory, to be blessed in the light of His heavenly love and glory for all eternity. Amen.