

“God’s Overwhelming Love”  
January 25, 2026  
Scripture: Isaiah 9:1-4; I Corinthians 1:10-25

I suppose no one is really comfortable with the image of Christ crucified. If a person were gleeful about it, I think I’d wonder about the state of their mental health. It’s not an image we like to linger on. Yet, for Paul it is the central message of the gospel. Why do you think that is? What does it mean for Paul that Jesus, the One who is raised from death, enters death through crucifixion as opposed to dying naturally or from illness or accident?

There are a lot of modern descriptions of that form of execution; it was extremely brutal. Intentionally so. But we don’t find anywhere in the New Testament a description of it. No one writing any of the gospels or the letters in the New Testament would have felt the need to describe crucifixion because everyone they were writing for would have known exactly what it was. I doubt there was anyone, anywhere in the Roman Empire who had not seen someone crucified. This was a form of punishment reserved for enemies of the State. There were other methods of executing people, quick and painless methods. But crucifixion was intended to cause suffering. And it was meant to be done publicly.

So, when Paul insists on elevating Christ crucified, he is placing Jesus’ life alongside all those others whom the Empire has deemed a threat. And you notice he doesn’t claim it was unjust or a mistake; he doesn’t try to rationalize it in any way. In fact, he celebrates it. It is a badge of honor. Granted, a strange honor, but for Paul what’s happened in Jesus’ crucifixion is a reversal of reality: oppression, brutality and hatred have all been overcome through the power of God’s overwhelming love.

That love is revealed through Jesus’ crucifixion. In that moment God makes a choice. God makes a choice for all those who are oppressed, who are exploited, who are rejected or neglected in the world. That’s what Paul means by God’s strength revealed through weakness. For Paul this means communities devoted to following Jesus are called to live in a new kind of unity. They’re called to put aside differences of ethnicity or background, economic differences, social status, all the categories we use to enforce division. They’re called to put aside all that and embrace a unity that sees beyond what’s socially acceptable and share the same compassion and empathy revealed in the crucified Christ.

Something unique about the community in Corinth was how diverse the city of Corinth was in the first century. People from all over the Empire, and from outside the Empire, came through Corinth for trade. It was an important port and the people in Corinth would have been exposed to all sorts of different religious practices. That may be why there was some confusion about what being baptized by a particular person could mean. Different religious groups may have identified with their founders, much like Christianity does, but it’s possible it wasn’t always clear what the distinction between the messenger and their message.

Based on the gospels, stories that Paul wouldn’t have known, Jesus tended to deflect claims about himself. As a devout Jew, he was interested in pointing folks toward God and

God's kingdom and away from himself. And even though the gospel stories we know didn't exist in Paul's day, he understood that Jesus was saying more about God and who God is than about himself. That's why he goes to such pains to explain to the people of this community that their trust should be put in Christ alone and not in messengers of the gospel.

It's a powerful claim that continues to challenge us, I think. We live in a world where so much is driven by certain personalities and claims that it can be hard to know what's true or reliable. How do we judge? What standard do we use to determine what to believe? The standard of Christ crucified means seeing the world through the lens of sacrifice and compassion. When people in power use violence and intimidation to assert their authority, as we've been seeing in Minneapolis recently, followers of the crucified Christ are called to stand with the vulnerable. A group of multifaith clergy was arrested Friday at the Minneapolis airport as they peacefully protested deportations of their neighbors being done without due process. There was no violence involved, just a quiet witness on behalf of people being unfairly treated.

Paul's words come to us through a community that must have struggled with similar issues. In their commitment to someone who was crucified, they have the challenge of discerning how someone executed by the state can be their role model. Why would a powerful God allow that to happen to God's Son? What does it say about God? For Paul, the message is love is more powerful than the authority of the state and its military. Later in this letter he'll be even clearer in that claim when he writes, "Now faith, hope and love abide—these three. But the greatest of these is love."

When we submit to God's overwhelming love, we discover that we identify with those around us who are vulnerable and struggling. All the beliefs we may have been taught about who deserves our concern and who does not are suddenly stood on their head. What once passed for wisdom is exposed as foolishness in light of God's love. What once we admired as strength is exposed as weakness in the shadow of the cross. As followers of Jesus we have to come to terms with the weakness and foolishness of the cross while living in a world that insists might makes right, which is the exact opposite of what Jesus taught.

By insisting on seeing the world from the perspective of Christ crucified and allowing God's love to shape us, we know what to look for when we engage the world around us. The crucifixion is an expression of God's love, not anger. It reveals the depths of compassion God is willing to go to in order to be near us and share our pain. That's what makes it strong. It takes tremendous strength to stand with others in solidarity when they endure hardship. The cross also reveals the only path to ending violence. We cannot meet violence with violence or hate with hate. As Martin Luther King said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." That's the wisdom of the cross.

So, when we meet forces of violence and hate in the world, we're called to respond with God's overwhelming love. For us that love is revealed uniquely and completely in Christ crucified. When we live with compassion, when we sacrifice our own comfort and security for the sake of those who are vulnerable and afraid, we reveal Christ crucified. Most of the time, that's not a message the world wants to hear. But everywhere it's proclaimed God's love will overwhelm hatred and division and bring healing to those who live in fear. Or as the prophet

might say, when God's love lives in us, the people who live in darkness will see a great light; those who live in deep darkness, on them, finally, light will shine.

Amen