

**Isaiah 58:1-9a**  
**1 Corinthians 2: 1-13**  
**February 6, 2011**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**

This morning the words of Paul speak to me on a deeply personal level. I look at the violence in Egypt, and indeed in the rest of the world; I read of the suffering and starvation; the destruction of the environment—the terrible list of the fruit of greed, fear, jealousy, prejudice and ignorance and I wring my hands in despair.

I witness the brutalities flagrant and subtle practiced by my fellow human beings on one another and am filled with a deep sense of just how far we are from the life Christ died to make possible.

Then, most disturbing of all, I recognize my own participation in this world of cruelty and ugliness and I feel a sense of helplessness and wonder what can I do? What difference can I or anyone make?

Beginning in High School I became socially and politically active: protesting the Vietnam War, moving to the city and working in inner city health clinics. Later, I returned to live in inner city neighborhoods, working on housing issues, coordinating worship in jails, protesting the injustice of criminal justice. In the end I burned out and I wonder if the world is no better for my idealistic efforts.

Yet as we hear from Isaiah, simply maintaining the outward appearance of religious practice receives only God's contempt. It is the call to personal and public acts of compassion and justice that God seeks from God's people. Only then, God says through Isaiah, will people experience peace and spiritual wholeness for themselves.

And yet this is the dilemma: how do we go about this practice of addressing the wrong of life when we are part of the problem?

How do we confront what is so clearly beyond us? What do we have to offer?

There was a time when I read these words of Paul and, to borrow a phrase from

the 1960's thought them a "cop out". After all, how does proclaiming Jesus crucified and risen feed anyone? How does it address world wide violence and disease? Yet today I hear Paul's words and I experience a deep and resonating truth:

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified...My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on the power of God.

The word "know" is critical here. Paul is clearly a highly educated individual. He is deeply knowledgeable about Hebrew and Greek culture and philosophy. He is a tent maker so he is also a skilled artisan who knows how to work with his hands. In short, Paul knows a great deal. Yet when he thinks about what he knows, the *only* knowledge worth sharing with the Corinthians is that of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead.

Paul's word translated "know" means "seen" "experienced". In other words Paul is sharing from first hand experience. He is sharing that which has transformed his life. Therefore, by saying that he decided to "know nothing but Jesus Christ and him

crucified” Paul is telling the Corinthians that of all that “worthwhile and interesting things he “knows” the *only* thing worth knowing is how God in and through Jesus Christ has transformed his life. And his reason for this is simple: the only real change that can happen is through the transformation that comes from faith in Jesus Christ. The only reliable source of true spiritual change comes from God alone.

Friends, this morning as we prepare to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, I propose to you that the solution to our dilemma concerning the great and important issues of violence poverty, oppression and all the rest of the worlds ills lie precisely here in Paul’s declaration. None of us can personally address the ills of the world. But we can witness to the power of the One who can.

It is my strong conviction that the suffering of the world is the symptom, the outcome of a world that is out of alignment with our Creator. In God there is no fear of death, no fear of abandonment or of poverty. Therefore when we are in proper relationship with God there is no need to grasp and stock pile or to

try to be successful or popular. In God we have everything we need; therefore there is no worry or fear, resentment, jealousy or self pity; there is no need to be in control or to have power. In God we are at peace within ourselves, with each other, with the earth and with God.

We cannot make our selves right with God and with ourselves, each other and the earth. That is why we believe that God sent Jesus Christ into the world to live with us, die for us and to rise to bring us to this right relationship. We have only to ask God to give us the grace to believe that this is really true and to come to trust Jesus Christ as our lord and Savior.

And it is my conviction which is confirmed every day by experience that we find our true place in God's heart through Jesus Christ we *will* be active vehicles of God's power in the world.  
Amen.