

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from the Wisdom of God,
Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen, amen.

I was one of the last ones converted to owning one a mobile phone. I resisted buying one as long as I could. PJ got her first one when we lived on Alaska. I couldn't really see the benefit. I mean if you think the signal strength is poor around here, it was nearly nonexistent in Alaska, especially if you got outside the city of Anchorage. I think the straw that broke the camel's back and forced my hand to get a cell phone was an exceptionally long drawn out Church Council meeting at our Church in Fairborn. I don't remember the issue, it might have been the subject of building the gymnasium/multi-purpose building, but I can't be sure. Anyway, it was a cold winter's evening and a storm blew in and we were debating whatever at the council meeting. I was probably 2 hours overdue and when I finally got home PJ was frantic. She was on the verge of calling the Sheriff to see if I was found in a ditch somewhere. After that night she insisted, and I agreed to get a cell phone. Ever since, this bloody piece of tech has slowly, but surely taken over my life. It's not the phone itself, but all the other things you can do with it that distracts me and uses up great portions of my time. Facebook takes up more time than I'd like to admit and checking emails has become a compulsion. I shop for the things I need and many things I never knew I needed on my phone. I track where I'm going and how long it takes to get there on my phone. I play Solitaire

for too much and I spend way too long looking at pictures and videos than I should. Smartphone addiction is no joke. Millions of us are hopelessly addicted. I don't think I use my smartphone more than anyone else I know, but when I took the Smartphone Compulsion Test, I scored 14 out of a possible 15 points. If you score 8 or higher the authors behind the test recommend considering seeing a psychologist, psychiatrist, or psychotherapist who specializes in behavioral addictions for a consultation. I may be in denial, but I don't think I need a psychiatrist for my cell phone use. I will admit though, the smartphone and the Apps are sometimes a distraction from real life. We hear a lot about tech addiction today. A quick Google search brought back almost a million returns. Many of them are from People ranting about their need to unplug to regain their sanity. Such an approach would seem to match the message of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where he challenges them to eliminate distractions and focus their attention on the message of Jesus Christ.

This week I read about folks who took all the addicting apps off their phones hoping to cut down on the distractions. One person advocated an app that forces your phone to display everything in black and white or grayscale. It's supposed to be very irritating and make you much less likely to scroll endlessly through screens of FaceBook or Shopping items because they are much less interesting in black and

white. I'm not one to advocate going back to the days without the miracle of the smartphone. They do offer many modern conveniences.

I like to pretend. So, today let's pretend the Apostle Paul somehow gets transported through the Dr Who Phone Booth to our generation, I can't imagine him not using every miracle of modern science to proclaim Christ crucified and risen. For that matter even Martin Luther, I believe would have been a great advocate of using the smartphone and every other advanced technology to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You see, it's not about the smartphone, or the laptop, or the iPad, it's what we use it for that matters. The technology isn't the point. The point is the cross in all its wisdom. It was the Cross of Christ that captivated Paul and has captivated Christ followers ever since. Paul understood what was essential for life. For Paul the only important message was the message of salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ. He let nothing distract him from that message. The Corinthians were sophisticated people, and the Paul knew it. They were residents of a Roman city in Greece. Corinth was cosmopolitan, intellectual and prosperous. If iPhones had been available, they would have had the latest versions. If Twitter had been invented, you can only imagine the tweet-storms that would have blown through the early Church. Paul didn't insist the Corinthians abandon their cosmopolitan lifestyle. Instead, he began in a humble way, saying, "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery

of God to you in lofty words or wisdom”. He certainly could have blown them away with a lecture filled with 5 syllable seminary words, but he chose not to. Instead, he says, “I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling”. “My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom,” says Paul, “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”. That’s the heart of Paul’s approach to his message about Jesus — he keeps it plain and simple, so Christian faith might rest entirely on the power and I might add the grace of God.

Paul knows the message about Jesus will never be as flashy as something that pops up on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or YouTube. It won’t go viral based on a clever video or a pithy tweet. Paul intentionally avoids the sophisticated language of Corinth, speaking instead only about “Jesus Christ, and him crucified”. It’s a message and a method we need to hear and employ today, if we want to demonstrate the wisdom of what we might call the SmartCross.

The message is: Christ crucified and risen for you. This message may appear dumb and stupid to many, but to us who are being saved, it’s the power of God. The method is: to live as though the message were true... Because it is.... Christ on the cross is God’s wisdom, secret and hidden from those whose hearts are hardened, but as members of the Christian community, we can understand it because it’s been revealed to us through the Holy Spirit.

I'm not advocating to get rid of our smartphones. Instead, let's embrace the One who can help us gain control of these devices or anything else that would try to bind us, preoccupy us, divert us, diminish us, distract us, or enslave us. With the Spirit of God in us, we can understand the wisdom of what Jesus accomplished. He bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for his glory. He gave himself for our sins to set us free. God reconciled all things to himself through Jesus, by making peace through the blood of his cross. Looking toward his own death, in John's Gospel, the 12th chapter, Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). He did it all to show us how much he loves us, saying, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). That's the wisdom of God — in a cross, a cross that brings us forgiveness, sets us free, reconciles us to God, draws us to Jesus and shows us how much he loves us. This wisdom comes to us all for free, courtesy of the Holy Spirit of God.

In a world where walls are constantly being built, technology and social media help us create 'windows' where we can interact as a community of faith, but the smartphone is not a savior, and it never will be. On the other hand, technology and social media can enable us to connect to our context, culture and community. As long as we stay focused on the message and the method, we need not fear embracing modern technology as a tool to spread our message. The center of who

we are as a Christian and as a community will always be the message Paul proclaimed, and the same message we need to be spreading today: Jesus Christ was crucified and raised for you. It's a message that rests not on human wisdom, but on the power of God. It's not taught through human wisdom, but spread through the Holy Spirit of God. Someone a lot smarter than me once said, "God is known primarily in the preaching of the crucified and risen Christ."

The good news for us today is that, unlike my smartphone, the message of Jesus Christ never needs an upgrade. We'll never need to wait in line for the latest version. Instead, the sacrificial death of Jesus is part of the eternal wisdom of God, and his gifts of forgiveness and eternal life are available to everyone who hears and trusts in Christ. In a world of smartphones that need regular replacing, God gives us the SmartCross which is the hinge-point of history and remains the same yesterday, today and forever. It points to Jesus Christ, crucified and raised. It reminds us that forgiveness is in the blood of Christ. It is an unmistakable symbol of incredible sacrificial love. So, go ahead and delete those addictive apps, if you need to or put your phone in permanent grayscale, but hang on to Jesus Christ, the eternal wisdom of God, revealed to us in His Cross through the Holy Spirit. May the Wisdom of God enlighten your hearts and minds and bring you the joy of Christ's salvation, which he did all for you. Amen.