

The Searching Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

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The library has long been one of my favorite places. I loved everything about it. The quiet, the orderly arrangement of books, the smell that machine made when you checked out. As I got older, I could drive myself to the main branch of our city's library and enjoy expanded sections for both fiction and non fiction. I would go to the library of our high school, to the public library, and when I was feeling especially courageous and adventurous, to one of the libraries at UT Arlington. Once I got into college, I really and truly enjoyed doing research to write a paper. Writing the actual paper, not so much, but looking for information and discovering it, definitely. The library at Trinity had an electronic catalog, but they also maintained the old fashioned card catalog while I was there. I miss the happenstance of flipping through those cards and having something catch my eye. I would search the indexes of books and again, in my searching, be surprised and delighted by things I found by accident.

By the time seminary rolled around, the card catalog still sat in one of the rooms of the library, but they weren't updating it anymore. The electronic searches had gotten better and better. The searching was in some ways better and definitely faster, but I'm old fashioned enough to say that today's students are missing out on those side trails and accidental discoveries that we found in our searching.

The library is a good place to experience searching. That kind of searching that I remember is somehow both to be the one searching, and to be the one discovered. I thought I was searching for information on a particular subject, but I also was surprised, or discovered, by this other insight that I didn't know I was looking for, at which point I became the searching one again, to go down that new path that opened up. It's not searching like looking for your car keys that you thought you left right there on the table, but it's a seeking and discovery and searching all in one, all happening at the same time. One of those things that's hard to put into words, apparently.

This series we're working our way through in 1 Corinthians is on the lectionary texts, but you can really blame my decision on today's passage. I was reading through it a month or so ago, and verse 10 stuck out to me. One of those things where I wonder if I've ever read it before. It certainly struck me in a way it

hadn't before. Verse 10: "These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

That struck me as something profound about the role of the Spirit that I hadn't considered before. I read and read and read this week—well, I searched--thinking that surely someone else has had something smart and wise and insightful to say about that verse in particular. And I'm sure someone has, but despite my searching, I didn't find much of anything on the Spirit's searching.

God has revealed these things—the things Paul means is what we were talking about last week—the wisdom of God that is Christ crucified. The only way we can grasp this idea, that foolishness is actually wisdom and apparent weakness is actually strength, is because the God is revealing these things to us through the Spirit. And why is the Spirit a particularly appropriate vehicle for this revelation? Well, because the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. The Spirit understands God, is God, to a depth that we can never understand and never know. And so the Spirit can reveal God's wisdom to us.

Paul touches on this in Romans also. Listen to these two verses from Romans 8. It's more about the role of the Spirit: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26-27). A lot of good stuff there, but notice that God searches the heart—I'm assuming our hearts, and thus knows our prayers even when we don't. And then further notice that God knows what is the mind of the Spirit, just like the Spirit searches the depths of God.

Somehow, and I don't pretend to have this even partially figured out, but somehow, God searches us and knows us—like the Psalmist says in Psalm 139 in the call to worship today. And the Spirit searches the depths of God, and God knows the mind of the Spirit, and God and the Spirit are together and separate. The Spirit searches everything, God searches the heart, God searches us and knows us, the Spirit knows God, and God knows the Spirit. This must be a part of how the three persons of the Trinity relate to each other—mutual searching of the depths of the others, knowing the minds of the others. And so the way the Spirit searches us, the way God knows us, is similar.

And when we think, "well that doesn't make any sense," maybe we're closer to understanding God's wisdom that seems like foolishness.

All that searching that the Spirit and God are doing for and of each other,

and all that searching that the Spirit and God are doing for and of us....that's what reminded me of searching in the library. The delight of being found by unexpected insights, the surprise of learning something I wasn't looking for in particular, the searching that was wisdom in itself, not only for its end product.

I picture God and God's Spirit doing that kind of mutual searching of each other and of us. Oh! Look over here—let's explore that, and then let's come back and look deeper here, and the searching and the being found are all tangled up together, in the mind and wisdom of the Triune God.

Sometimes a sermon goes places I don't expect, and I'm not sure I know exactly where we're ending up today. But to be searched and known by God, to receive revelations from the Spirit who searches the depths of God, to be loved to our very depths, that is a gift and a blessing.