

## *“The Secret”*

February 6, 2011

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I know a secret. It’s about our church. I only learned it two weeks ago. I didn’t even know I didn’t know it until I learned it, but now I know. Would you like to know the secret? I’m not going to tell you, yet....

We love a good mystery. Combine an ancient secret with the potential to shatter the world-as-we-know-it with a conspiracy to conceal that secret at the highest levels of power, preferably involving the Roman Catholic Church and the Knights Templar, and we have the makings of a yarn that will entertain us no matter what winter brings.

We love a good mystery, but in a world in which “knowledge is power,” not all mysteries are good. We get divided into factions; those who know and those who don’t know; inside elites versus ignorant outsiders. Those of us who know enjoy our status; we’re superior to those ignorant outsiders. We condescend from the heights of our wisdom to mingle among them, but we know who we are and who they are not, and we preserve our status. And if we think we don’t know, or at least we don’t know well enough, we hold back. We keep silent. Who are we to speak up? It’s not like we’re in the know!

Paul turns this thinking on its head. 1 Corinthians 2 is an exercise in irony. Paul turns the insider language of the Corinthians on its head: *1 Corinthians 2:6-7 (NRSV) Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.*<sup>1</sup>

For Paul, it’s no secret. Being a Christian doesn’t give us superior status over the world. Being a Christian sends us to serve for the world. We’re not part of the problem. We’re part of the solution.

### ✠ PART OF THE PROBLEM

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Christianity is perceived to be a significant source of the world’s problems. People hear, “I’m a Christian,” and associate us with the folks who protest at soldiers’ funerals, or blow up abortion clinics, or hate homosexuals. Put us in a room with a Muslim, a Jew, and someone who is “none-of-the-above,” and we circle one another like wary animals.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

We are perceived as arrogant spiritual elitists. We are perceived as people who think that we know better and that our superior knowledge gives us the right to judge others.

We comfort ourselves by saying, "That's not me. I don't hate or support those who do." These are admittedly extreme examples, but we do sit in judgment of one another. We do retreat into safe havens of the company of those who like what we like and think like we think. We do reduce our faith to right knowledge, right judgment, and the right to judge.

We are heirs of Corinth. We want our faith to rest on human wisdom and not on the power of God. We set the terms that way. We're in control and can stay in our comfort zone.

Paul talks about coming to the Corinthians *"in weakness and in fear and in much trembling."* When is the last time you did something for Jesus Christ that had you feeling like that? When is the last time you became weak so that the Spirit could give you strength?

These are challenging times for the Church of Jesus Christ. We can recall the days when we were strong. The pews were full; so were the offering plates. Now, they're not. Now, we're not strong.

Not to worry; we know what to do. We'll judge. If only the sermons were better. If only the Sunday School was better. If only the music was better. If only our leaders did a better job. Then we'd be strong again.

It's not working, thank God, because the central premise is false; the central premise is that human wisdom can save us. It can't. It never could. It's part of the problem.

Our newfound weakness is an opportunity to re-discover the power of God. These challenging times invite us to renewal that demonstrates the movement of the Spirit in our midst.

We don't know how to do this. We don't know what it will cost or where it will lead. What we do know is this – we've got a problem. If we do what we know how to do, if we try to stay in control, if we continue to rely on human wisdom, we will continue to realize the results we've been realizing. If we seize this

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opportunity and renew our reliance on the power of God, if we step out of our comfort zone and deepen our discipleship, then we’ll be strong again, but that doesn’t mean we’ll be strong according to the measures of human wisdom. Our strength will be measured in spirit. Our strength will be measured in lives changed by the power of God.

We don’t know how to do this. We don’t know what it will cost or where it will lead. We can only begin where we are. *“In weakness and in fear and in much trembling”* we can take the first step and confess, “Lord, I’m part of the problem.”

✠ PART OF THE SOLUTION

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We are watching the world change. Tyrants are being toppled. First Tunisia, now, in Egypt and Yemen, despots are dealing with unprecedented resistance to their strong-armed rule. No one is responsible; no “one” is responsible. There’s no charismatic leader orchestrating the rebellion, just tens of thousands of citizens with cell phones and internet access. They know there’s a problem, and they are committed to being part of the solution.

The rulers of this age are trembling. They know what to do with charismatic leaders. Mass movements are another matter all-together. The spirit that energizes them is a power the rulers cannot overcome. Today, it’s Egypt and Yemen; where will the spirit move next?

We are witnessing a profound power shift; from the palace to the piazza; from the high and mighty to the meek and lowly. Once again, John Locke is proven right; rulers govern only with “the consent of the governed.” When the governed withhold that consent, governments topple, and they never saw it coming.

*1 Corinthians 2:14-15 (NRSV) Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else’s scrutiny.<sup>2</sup>*

We are witnessing a power shift from “what’s in it for me” to “what’s in it for we,” for us. Individuals are committing themselves; they are standing together when the horses and camels come at them; they are enduring together the bruises

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

1 Corinthians 2:1-16; Psalm 112:1-10; Matthew 5:13-20

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from the batons and the sting of the whip; they are offering themselves, sacrificing themselves for the sake of a greater common good. They are modeling for us the wisdom of the cross.

When we look out for ourselves, when our primary goal is to survive, we will fall. We perpetuate the problem because we are refusing the gifts of God’s Spirit and sticking to the foolish ways we know. When our primary goal is to participate in God’s mission for the world, whatever that takes, whatever that costs, and we offer ourselves to God’s vision of a world that is defined by faith, forgiveness, and freedom, a world born of love, hope, and peace, we become part of the solution. We become a sign, foretaste, and instrument of “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” *1 Corinthians 2:7 (NRSV) ... we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.*<sup>3</sup>

I promised you a secret; here it is. Our organ has four sets of pipes. We know how to access the pipes to my left; we enter the chamber via a door in the library. The pipes behind me require only a step-ladder, but how do we access the pipes to my right?

I did not know, so I asked Nils Rickard, as the youth group plays hide-and-seek, and Nils has explored our church from top to bottom, but Nils did not know. He offered to climb across a beam in the rafters from the left to the right, but I said, “That’s not necessary.”

Someone talked to someone else and the secret was revealed. The middle panel behind the piano is held on by a few screws. Remove those screws, and voila! We have access!

Being a Christian doesn’t give us superior status over the world. Being a Christian sends us to serve for the world. We can be more than part of the problem. We can be part of the solution. Commitment to God’s purpose; commitment to serve the world for Christ’s sake is the secret. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.