

4th Sunday in Lent – Year C

March 14, 2010

Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

1Corinthians 1:18-25

Pastor Paul Horn

We are fools in Christ

I. We believe a wonderfully foolish message

II. We believe in a wonderfully foolish Savior

¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” ²⁰Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

How does the world decide what’s important? Is it based on the number of flashbulbs popping as celebs strut their stuff down the red carpet on Oscar Night? Is it based on the millions paid to professional athletes, who are nothing more than overpaid entertainers? Is the value the world places on rocks and stones, on paper that is dyed green, or the label of your clothing? Why is that Miss USA is always the prettiest, and the handsome, gifted athlete becomes the heartthrob at school? The problem is that too often, these folks do not look at their abilities and blessings as from God, but reasons to boast and build themselves up. They think they’re important because of what they have. The world thinks they’re important because of what they have.

What matters to God is not what we have, but what we don’t have; holiness, perfection, the righteous life he demands. God points the finger at the foolishness of our sinful lives and shows

us that we need a Savior, to which we point the finger back and say, “That’s foolish!”

It shouldn’t surprise us that the message of Christ crucified is rejected by sinful mankind. Later in this letter Paul explains, “**The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.**” (1 Corinthians 2:14) From the time we’re born we believe that our mind is the measure of all truth. Whatever seems reasonable to us gets our nod of approval. Whatever seems unreasonable is rejected.

The world’s litmus test for truth falls into two basic categories. The wow factor and the IQ factor. The wow factor says, “Does this grab my attention?” Paul said in vs22, “**The Jews look for signs.**” Jesus did just that, he gave the Jews all the signs they needed. He healed the sick, raised the dead, cured those with incurable diseases, he exorcised the demons, fed thousands with a handful of food... but the Jews yawned at it all and rejected it because they were looking for something more, a political Messiah, a warrior king to bring the hated Romans down to ruin.

Today, many folks look to Jesus in the same way; to rid world of war, bring peace, end poverty, assure civil rights and end suffering. But Jesus never promised those things. In fact, he did promise that those things would continue to plague the world until the end of time. But that message doesn’t wow most people.

The second test is the IQ factor. In vs22 Paul said, “Greeks look for wisdom.” Does this religion appeal to my intellect? Does it sound *smart*? The apostle Paul had dealt with those characters in Athens. “[**They**] **spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.**” (Acts 17:21) When Paul shared the message about Jesus, many laughed themselves to tears when he mentioned the resurrection of the dead. “**What is this babbler trying to say?**” they sneered. (Acts 17:32).

According to the wisdom of the world, if the core message of the Bible is Christ crucified, then the Bible completely misses the boat on our real problems. Glance at the headlines in the news for a week and jot down the top 10 problems the world is facing today. Your list would include things like the supposed theory of global warming, stress in the world-wide economy, nuclear testing in the Middle East and health care reform. One headline you’ll never read is, “Multitudes going to hell – everyone needs Jesus.” That just doesn’t sound intellectual. How can *Jesus* be the answer when mankind has spent *centuries* developing philosophies and theories about the meaning of life? How could the greatest minds on earth be overruled by this single, simple, humble solution, “Christ crucified for the sins of the world”? “**The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing**” (vs23) Why? Because by nature we believe that we

can save ourselves. By nature no one thinks they need God's help. We believe God needs our help. It's the stubborn self-reliance of unbelief. But this only proves that **"in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him"**. (vs21a)

Paul continues the verse, **"God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."** (vs21b) How foolish does this sound to your sinful mind...

In his wisdom God chose to send his Almighty Son to this world by passing through the birth canal of a young virgin woman. Utter foolishness! In his wisdom Jesus grew up in obscurity and spent most of his vital ministry on the outskirts of the Holy Land. Ridiculous! In his wisdom God had his Son nailed to a Roman cross among the dregs of society. Absurd! In his wisdom God had Christ suffer, bleed, endure merciless humiliation, and finally give up his life – yes, God almighty *died*. Outrageous! In his wisdom, by means of that single death, all the sins of all the people of all time were paid in full. Preposterous! In his wisdom, God chose to raise his dead Son's body from the grave. Resurrection of the dead? The Apostle Paul had stood before an important Roman official named Festus and shared the saving work of Christ Jesus, he said, **"I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."** At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. **"You are out of your mind, Paul!"** he shouted. **"Your great learning is driving you insane."** Resurrection? Hah! Silliness!

Is that message foolish? Is it insane? Ask the wayward son from our Gospel this morning, who left home and squandered his entire inheritance for a few fleeting months of fun and games. Ask him what he thought of his father running out to meet him, embracing him, stinking of pigs and in filthy rags, and welcoming him back to the warmth and security of his home with no strings attached. Ask him what it felt like to receive such amazing, forgiving love when what he deserved was a locked door and a note saying, "I told you so!" Ask him if he thought his father was foolish. Then ask yourself, because you are that son. You are the one who has received the Fathers' unconditional forgiveness. You know a Savior who took your place in the disgrace of sin and redeemed the life you've squandered. You know what it's like to fall into your heavenly Father's open arms. You know it because God told you so and gave you the faith with which to believe it. Truly, **"the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."**

By God's grace we believe what we otherwise would call foolish. How did such a foolish message turn around a sinful mind, entrenched in its belief that human reason, intellect and good

works are the way to salvation?

It's like trying to convince a UK fan to convert to a Louisville Cardinal fan. The UK fan will say, "Uh, hello! We have 7 national championships, second only to UCLA. In addition, you want me to cheer for a team coached by Rick Pitino? That traitor...." In eyes of a UK fan, this doesn't make sense. No amount of reasoning will change their minds.

In the same way, no amount of debating, reasoning, pleading or arguing will turn any heart to Christ. Only the foolish message of the cross can do that. There is where the Holy Spirit does his work, through that message, Christ crucified for sinners and raised for their eternal salvation, that foolish message changes heart and changes mind, overcomes unbelief.

Some might call this message a weak one, God hanging derelict on the cross, but Paul says, vs18, "**The message of the cross... is the power of God.**" The Greek word for power in vs18 is where our English word *dynamite* is derived. That weak and foolish message is so powerful that when it is applied to water, it washes away sins, it raises those who are dead in sin to a new life in Christ. That weak and foolish message is so powerful, that when it is proclaimed from a pulpit, when shared between friends and family members, turns the rock solid heart of stubborn unbelief into living, breathing believing soul. That message is so powerful, that when it is applied to simple bread and simple wine, there the promise of God is that Christ's very body and blood are also present. Foolishness to the world, beyond our human reason, but for us... but for us who are being saved, it is the means of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation from death, hell and our sins.

What man considers foolish, God proves is wisdom. What man considers weak, God proves is strength. Jews saw the cross as proof of weakness. God made that cross the world's most powerful instrument for good. The Greeks saw the gospel as proof of absurdity. God made that gospel the greatest truth the mind of man can receive. (1Corinthians People's Bible pg.21, *Northwestern Publishing House*)

And so, if you were to gather all the intellect and education of Socrates, Plato, Kant, Descartes, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger, they would not be able to figure out that God has shown the world his love for them through his Son Jesus Christ. How foolish they are when compared to God's foolishness! God's foolishness says, "I have saved your soul from death, from Satan, from your sins, by having my Son work it all out for you. Simply believe in my Son, that he died and rose for you, you will be saved." If the world calls us fools for believing that

simple yet powerful message, than let us be the biggest fools this world has ever seen! Amen.