

Lenten Mid-Week #1

March 1, 2017

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The Foolishness of the Cross

Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

The general theme for our Lenten sermons is “We Preach Christ Crucified.” That is simply the message of the cross. The cross is the crowning point of self-renunciation. Christ’s cross is the ordained instrument of our salvation.

The apostle Paul determined to know nothing among the Corinthians except that “word of the cross.” It is the message we trust and share. There are two reactions to that message of Jesus’ cross on which he died to pay for the world’s sins. For us who are being saved, the message of Jesus’ cross is “the power of God” that creates faith and endows the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven that faith brings. For those who are perishing, headed for ruin in their present state of unbelief, the message of Jesus’ cross is just so much foolishness.

The Holy Spirit has enlightened us. He has enabled us to recognize that what unbelievers think is unreasonable, lacks good judgment, and is just plain silly is in reality the wonderful superior wisdom of God. It is not foolishness to us that God became a man, and died on a cross to redeem the lost. God’s ways are above and beyond us. And yes, we admit that without the Spirit the miracle of the word of Jesus’ cross would be foolishness to us still.

The message of the Christ crucified, our Savior’s Passion, Lent, is a stumbling block to those who demand continuing signs, and foolishness to the thinkers who believe they must come to an understanding of every means and purpose for what happens. God has called us to see things differently. Christ crucified is a plan that is far greater than any human plans. What God’s power accomplishes in even its weakest element is greater than human strength.

Several players in the great drama of Jesus’ Holy Passion act on their failure to see Jesus’ cross for what it actually is, “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” To them it was just so much nonsense.

Remember when your parents told you to “knock off the foolishness?” Foolishness is something that serves no purpose. It is something that contradicts rational thought, not to mention good sense. Foolishness is a waste of time that accomplishes nothing except make you look silly. In the Bible, the word also includes sinful, proceeding from depravity

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor; Caiphas, the High Priest; Herod, the puppet King all thought what Jesus claimed and carried out to the point of his death on the cross was foolishness. They thought they knew better than God about what God was doing. As a result, they are part of the answer to the rhetorical questions the apostle asks, “Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? They are nowhere. God has relegated them and their false opinions about the message of the cross to the dustbin of history.

Pontius Pilate was a wise man in the sense of being a savvy politician. Yet rather than listening to Jesus and seeing the King of the universe before him as Jesus claimed, the governor thought Jesus’ claims were so much nonsense. This prisoner even thought there was such a thing as

absolute truth and he was it. Instead of grabbing a hold of the truth of his salvation in Christ, Pilate mocked, “Quid est veritas,” what is truth?

When Caiphas confronted Jesus, the high priest thought it was foolishness that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Jesus had done nothing to throw off the chains of Roman oppression. There was nothing in this Galilean’s message and actions to indicate a great concern for social justice and the survival of Israel as a nation. About the only possible good to come out of all this foolishness, Caiphas suggested, was to turn Jesus over to the Romans so they would look favorably on God’s people. Caiphas looks the fool by totally missing the actual meaning and result of what he said to the Sanhedrin, “You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” [John 11:50]

Herod wanted to see Jesus do a miracle. The Romans puppet ruler had heard about the miracles Jesus had done. He wanted to meet Jesus and see Jesus perform another miraculous sign. Herod wanted only to see the results of Jesus’ power rather than see the God-man behind the power whose miracles displayed his true nature, and showed that Jesus also then had the power to forgive sins as he claimed. Jesus remained silent in Herod’s presence because he did not want to give the King any credence to his foolish opinions.

We are not exempt from the temptation to stumble over Jesus’ cross by wondering if it really is true, true for me. Did God really suffer and die as a man under my sin so that I have his righteousness under the law to declare me holy in God’s sight? Yes, he did. That is not foolishness but God’s wisdom and power to redeem us and make us his children.

Are we tempted to turn Jesus into something other than a Savior perhaps an advocate of social justice? We can begin to think of Jesus as merely a good example of love, which he is, but Jesus is so much more. Do we ever ask Jesus do just one more miracle so I will believe in him? Even after he has taken care of me time and time again when I don’t deserve it.

For us whom the Holy Spirit has called to faith, Christ crucified is the message that comforts our hearts and gives strength to our faith. When we struggle against the above and other temptations, and lose the battle we must face our guilty consciences. The word of the cross for us is no stumbling block on the way to God. We do not need human understanding of every detail and purpose to God’s plans.

We look to Jesus’ cross, to the message of Christ crucified which for us includes his coming back to life and rising from the dead in triumph over all our enemies, as the wisest and most powerful thing our gracious forgiving God could do for us, and did for us.

Paul’s words to the Romans come to mind. “Who will bring any charge against those God has chosen?...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” [8:33-35]

Like Jesus we must face those who wrongly believe that what he did on the cross makes no sense, has no purpose, and since it contradicts all rational thought cannot be true. This is part of our sharing in his suffering. What opportunities to seize as our Savior took to even more boldly and directly preach Christ crucified. The Holy Spirit will continue to open the eyes of the spiritually blind to spiritual sight. He will continue to turn what they once thought of as foolishness into the wisdom and power of God for them. Amen. <SDG>

