

1 Corinthians 1:18-25
“Foolishness!”
Sunday March 7th, 2021

Christians are under attack here and around the world. The world says we preach foolishness and then fail to live up what we preach. And yet around the world Christians are under attack.

Try being a public figure that stands up for traditional sexual morality standards and traditional marriage, and see how long it takes for you to be canceled. Recent legislation in the US will make that even easier.

In the predominately Christian region of Tigray Ethiopia 1000s were killed in that last few weeks including priests and Sunday School children in church.

Nigeria leads the world in persecuted and martyred Christians. Recently 9 people killed 21 homes burned down in a night time raid.

Christianity, Christ and the Christian Word has always been under attack for Christ is the power and wisdom of God and the powers of evil have always sought to silence them.

But despite it all, for 2 millennium, the “Foolishness of the cross” continues to be preached which is the power of God for those being saved.

We as Christians bear a message that is more important than we as the messengers. But when we as the messengers let the message touch us, it transforms us, and becomes the power and wisdom of God in our lives.

The Corinth church was a very disturbed church. It is the type of church I would never want to serve. Both 1st & 2nd Corinthians address problems in this deeply divided church. It was divided over baptism and who did the baptisms. It was divided over spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues. It had members suing each other in court.

A man married his father's wife. People were showing up for Holy Communion and getting drunk and stuffed while others went away hungry and thirsty.

And yet their divisions, sins and heartaches inspired Paul to write these magnificent words on the foolishness of wisdom, and the power of the Cross, which is the wisdom and power of God.

This disturbed church inspired chapter 13, one of the most beautiful illuminations of Godly love, and chapter 15 taught us about the resurrection of the body. Chapter 12 taught us about the Church, the Body of Christ and how to exercise our spiritual gifts within it. The foolishness of the Corinthians was the catalyst for releasing the wisdom and power of God that inspires us to this very day.

Now as we see from our Gospel reading today the Jews demanded signs. The Jews demanded a sign from Jesus after he cleared out the Temple saying, **"What sign have you to show us for doing this?"** To which Jesus replied, **"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."** The temple he was referring to of course was his body. And the sign they demanded was to come 3 years later.

The sign that the efficacy of their religion was over was right before them, in that Jesus drove out all the animals that were there to be sacrificed for sins. His sacrifice on the cross was going to be the last blood sacrifice needed for sin. His driving out of the animals and the overturning of the money changers tables was a sign of the beginning of their end. They asked for a sign that they saw, but they did not understand it. As Jesus said elsewhere "seeing and seeing but they do not see, hearing and hearing but they do not hear."

His disciples remembered this after his resurrection from the dead, which ties in directly of course with today's scripture. When Paul spoke about "the Cross". It was a shorthand way of saying **"Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf"**. It wasn't just a reference to the physical cross, though, that was part of the offense the Jews took to the preaching of Christ.

Verse 23 says, “But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles/Greeks.” The word in Greek that is translated in English as “stumbling block” is in Greek, “skandalon” from which we get the word “scandal” today. It was a scandal. It was foolishness to the Jews that anyone crucified on a tree could be the messiah, the Son of God for Deuteronomy 21:33 says, “Anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse”.

“To the Jew, the fact of the crucifixion, so far from proving that Jesus was the Son of God, disproved it finally.” Barclay 1 Cor. p. 21

To a Jew the cross in this house of worship on the wall and on the altar would have the same affront for us today if we walked into this room and there was an electric chair hanging on the wall and one on the altar. It would be scandalous! It would be an affront. It would be foolishness.

Righteousness with God, right relationship with God for the Jew came through following the Law. It came through blood sacrifice for sin. Jesus tossing out all the animals and money was a direct threat to not only their income, but also to the very basis for their religion.

Jesus Christ on the cross was the final blood sacrifice. Jesus there redeemed, or bought us back, from all our sin. Jesus paid the price there for all our sin. Another great theological word to describe what Jesus was on the cross; he was the **expiation** for our sin. He was the sacrifice for our sin.

Do you want to know how bad your sin is? If you think sins not bad, or my sin is not that bad. Just look at Jesus hanging on the cross and know your sin cost Jesus his life in a gruesome way.



Now the Cross to the Greeks was total foolishness. The Greek philosophers that Paul and other Christian preachers addressed rejected outright that God would put on flesh and that God was even capable of caring for us and loving us. To them God was without any emotion. He was apathetic.

“A God who suffered was to the Greeks a contradiction in terms. The very idea of incarnation, of God becoming a man, was revolting to the Greek mind. To any thing Greek, the incarnation was a total impossibility. To people who thought like that, it was incredible that one who had suffered as Jesus had suffered could possibly be the Son of God.” Barclay 1 Cor. p. 22, 23

To them it was utter foolishness and not wisdom, much less the wisdom of God.

But to we as Christians and Christian preachers, “the Cross of Christ” is the power and the wisdom of God. And we continue to preach Christ, the incarnated word of God. Out of love he died for us to pay for our sins. In power he rose as a sign of his and our future victory.

No matter how imperfect, or disunited, or dysfunctional the church may seem to be... keep teaching and preaching the Word become flesh. I have often taught that our love for God and the Church is that occasionally we become so frustrated with it we want to quit and maybe in our minds we quit for a day, but we realize it is the message that matters not the jars of clay that we are that carry it. It is not the affronts we face it is Christ and Christ crucified that matters!!

I know I have gotten so discouraged I have quit for a while.. I remember one day in Mesa; I was so discouraged I just lay down on the floor of my office and said, “God, I’m done!” But as I lay there, God gave me another idea and I got up and got to work again on a project that took me 14 years to complete. So, if you quit for a day it’s fine just get up the next and know God’s still has a message for you to carry, a job and purpose for you uniquely to perform.

It's the word of the Cross that matters. And those whom God calls “the word of Christ crucified”, it will save them. So, my friends, preach the word. You don’t have to be an ordained pastor, or CLM to preach the word. My mom taught me to preach just by preaching to me. I still can hear her calling me, “Freddie” and then the rest sermon would arrive.

Preach the word of the Cross in word and deed. We know the words and at times we need to share them. The cross also calls us to preach the word through sacrifice, and through actions like Jesus did casting things and attitudes and ideas out of our lives.

This quote is attributed to St. Francis, **“Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.”**

A story is told of 4 priests who on a balmy day in New York swapped their clerical clothes for polos, khakis and a round of golf.

After several really horrible shots, their caddy asked, “You guys wouldn’t happen to be priests by any chance?”

“Actually, yes, we are,” one replied, “How did you know?”

“Easy”, said the caddy. “I’ve never seen such bad golf and such clean language.”

Yes, some are here today and listening here today and are saved because the foolishness of the Cross, the wisdom and power of the Cross was preached to them in word and deed.

Keep preaching my friends for those who are being saved are People of Peace to you. You will gather them as an audience, they will listen to you, and they will be saved.

To those who reject the word, say a prayer for them, knock the dust off your sandals and continue on. Turn them over to the grace of God that “O For a 1000 Tongues to Sing” vs. 4 speaks of, **“He breaks the power of canceled sin, he sets the prisoner free, his blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me.”**

That my friends is, “the power of the Cross” that we will now celebrate in Holy Communion.

What is God saying to you and what are you going to do?
Let us join now in the Sacrament.