

"The Foolish Wisdom of the Cross"

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

*What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, Dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
They pity without end?
Oh make me Thine forever!
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never,
Outlive my love for Thee. (TLH 172)*

Dear Fellow Christians as I trust you are all aware, we are in the sacred season of Lent. In fact we are now about halfway through that season. You are no doubt also aware that Lent is a time designed for each one of us to dedicate ourselves to the special contemplation of our own sinfulness on the one hand, and, on the other, to the contemplation of the misery and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus. Obviously the two are intimately connected, for we acknowledge always that it was Jesus who through his suffering and death has washed us clean from the filth of our own sin and set our feet on the path to heaven.

So how are you doing in that soul-searching? Started yet? Plan to spend any time on it at all? Or is it maybe one of those things you have every intention of doing but just don't seem to get around to? The text that will form the basis for our meditation this morning might help. That text is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the First Chapter:

^{ESV} 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

These are the verbally inspired words of our God. Trusting that our God will once again bless us through the study of these words, and treasuring them above all earthly wealth, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

The fact that you are hearing or reading this sermon indicates a good thing, for that is almost certainly an indication that you understand your own spiritual needs and acknowledge the value and benefit of Lent, and of the special gift that the season of Lent can be – is *intended* to be. Part of Christian growth and maturity is learning to appreciate Lent more and more as unique and irreplaceable. It is learning to regard it not as a burden or irritation that must be endured for a few weeks each year, but to see it as a God-given opportunity for comfort, growth, and strengthening – an oasis in a parched and arid spiritual wasteland.

While Christians seek to grow and mature in their view of and appreciation for the blessings offered to us in Lent, the world takes the exact opposite path. The world increasingly views religion as an annoyance and worship services as irritating disruptions. They tend to regard such gatherings as quaint throwbacks to a less enlightened era, and therefore as more or less a waste of time. There is, after all, so much to do and only so much time to get it all done...

In a word, society regards all of this religion stuff as just so much foolishness.

There have, of course, been other foolishnesses condemned by this and former societies. It was pure foolishness to imagine that human beings could just walk up to a door and have it open all on its own. Foolishness to imagine that man could fly at all, let alone have 250 full grown adults with all of their luggage walk onto a machine that would carry them 500 miles an hour 30,000 feet *in the air* across an ocean in quiet safety and comfort. Foolishness to imagine that man would walk on the moon. Foolishness to imagine that doctors could remove a heart from a recently deceased human being and to place it into the chest cavity of another human being, hook everything up, and have that heart start functioning normally again. Utter foolishness to imagine that a majority of our citizens could walk around with a device half the size of a deck of cards that would allow them to communicate instantly with every other person who has a similar device anywhere in the world.

You get the point. The fact that this or any other society regards something as foolish really doesn't amount to diddly squat. They've been wrong before; they will be wrong again.

Nothing much new here. Our text for this morning told us that God's one and only path to heaven has been dismissed as foolishness for the past 2000 years – longer even. Yet at all times, and especially during the season of Lent, we focus on this foolishness, for we resolve – along with the Apostle Paul in our text – to proclaim the simple message of Christ crucified. We preach the cross, and we do so fully aware that **“the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.”**

Let's speak clearly and honestly here. Is the **“word (message) of the cross”** foolishness? As far as man is concerned, of course it is. Christians, on the other hand, know such things as “mysteries of the faith.” The world around us will never know them as such. They will always and only judge everything like **“the message of the cross”** according to the standard of their own intelligence and reason. With that as their only guide, the message of Jesus Christ crucified will always be foolishness.

Our response? *“Why stop there?”* The fact is for every one apparent inconsistency, contradiction, or “foolishness” that the world can identify, Christians could identify ten others. Why stop at the foolishness of the cross. What about the fact that we claim to have one God, but then speak of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – each of which are fully God? That is, at minimum, bad math. We also teach and believe that Jesus was fully God and fully human at the same time. That's bad physics. Jesus is in heaven, but he is also everywhere else. That's bad geography. So also Jesus is eternal (has no beginning and no end) and yet he was conceived and born 2000 years ago. Jesus took part in the creation of all things, yet he was born of a virgin woman. God cannot die, yet on Good Friday Jesus (true God) died. God is merciful and forgiving, and yet God is perfectly just and therefore demands payment in full for every single sin.

How do we reconcile or explain such things? Is it because Christians are dumber, more ignorant, or more naïve than others in our society? To the world that's pretty much it. You and I know differently. We believe such foolishness only because God the Holy Spirit has visited us with his divine wisdom; with an insight that far transcends man's wisdom. It is the Holy Spirit who worked a spectacular miracle in the heart of every single Christian. That miracle allows us to be at peace with divine truths that we cannot fully comprehend, let alone logically explain to others. It

is God alone who has given us the ability to sit quietly at his feet and to learn divine truth from him. It is God who allows us to **“be still, and know that He is God.”** He taught us not only to *believe* such things, but to wholeheartedly embrace them and to be profoundly comforted by them.

How could we ever be comforted by that which we cannot fully comprehend or explain? Because God's Word teaches us that we have a God who is infinitely wiser, smarter, and more knowledgeable than we are. We are comforted in knowing that we have a God who comprehends what we cannot – not just the “big picture” but the *whole* picture of all human existence.

In fact how demoralizing to cling to a god that knows no more than we can know. How discouraging to have to rely on some “divine entity” that is capable of no more than we are capable of. How disturbing to worship a god that comprehends no more than we can comprehend. *That* is the sort of foolishness that natural man embraces. Our God has given us the privilege of seeing more, and of knowing that which we could never know on our own. He has given us *divine wisdom*, and such sublime truths *often* exist beyond - and contradict – human reason.

We return to our text for this morning, where we read: ***For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”*** ²⁰ ***Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?***

A brief survey of the Passion history and of Jesus' enemies described there verifies and solidifies these truths. In fact we often find our own sinful doubts and inadequacies reflected in the actions of the godless.

“Where is the one who is wise?” Paul asks in our text. Pontius Pilate clearly thought of himself as a pretty savvy customer, didn't he? He obviously had lofty political ambitions, and this business with Jesus and his Jewish antagonists was obviously an irritating distraction for him. Though his responsibility, his duty or obligation, was to dispense justice for those over whom he ruled, he rendered anything but fairness in connection with Jesus. He knew full well that Jesus had done nothing wrong. He admitted as much. Yet what did he in his “wisdom” offer the Jews? ***“Jesus is innocent, so I will whip him and then let him go.”*** Seriously? In what system of justice would

a barbaric Roman flogging serve as a just punishment for an innocent man? Talk about foolishness.

Pilate then seeks to smooth the whole thing over, first with his pseudo-philosophical statement to Jesus (“**What is truth?**”) and then with his absurd hand-washing and nonsensical proclamation that he is somehow thereby innocent of the blood of the man that he is nonetheless falsely condemning to death. Pilate’s goal wasn’t justice. It was to preserve his office and his power, and to make himself look good. A Jewish revolt would look very bad on his resume, so the easy, expedient solution was to condemn an innocent man. There you have *man’s* wisdom.

Again in our text Paul asks: “**Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?**” The people of Jesus’ day, when asked such a question, would probably have pointed to Caiaphas, the High Priest. Yet this was the man who didn’t even understand or rightly believe the wisest thing he himself ever said: “**It is expedient (better) for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.**” (John 11:50) What *he* meant, of course, was that Jesus posed a threat to their position and power, which made Jesus expendable. Clearly another great example of man’s wisdom and its contrast with God’s wisdom.

Again from our text: “**Jews demand signs.**” This is exactly what Herod demanded when he saw Jesus. Exactly what Jesus’ enemies demanded as they surrounded his cross: “**Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.**” (Mark 15:32) Again, man’s wisdom, man’s logic, put on display for all to see.

Our reaction? Give us God’s wisdom! Man’s wisdom called for Jesus to abandon his mission and thereby to sentence all of humanity to eternal torment. In direct contradiction to the collected wisdom of the world, our Lord, our Savior, held unwaveringly to God’s wisdom, which was the path to the cross. Thanks be to God that he did, for therein we find more than just wisdom. There Jesus paid what he did not owe for us, who owed what we could not pay – and therein we find eternal life. By grace, through faith, God credits Jesus’ perfection to each of us. God’s wisdom was to provide forgiveness to each of us through the life and death of his own Son.

Therefore we resolve again this morning, according to the wisdom that God alone has given us, that we will continue to “**preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to**

those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Exodus 20:1-17** And God spoke all these words, saying, ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷ "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. ⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ¹² "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³ "You shall not murder. ¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ "You shall not steal. ¹⁶ "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

^{ESV} **John 2:23-25** Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Third Sunday in Lent – March 4, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 148 (Stanzas 1-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Light, My Life"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Exodus 20:1-17) God gave the Ten Commandments as a summary of the perfection he requires of every human being. Jesus alone kept them perfectly. Now those same Commandments serve as a perfect summary of God's will for Christians who want to thank him for the forgiveness that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is ours, and as we walk the path to heaven we seek to thank our God by our obedience to His holy will. How fitting then to be reminded of our God's will.

Psalm 85 (Supplement page 40) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (John 2:23-25) Having heard God's perfect summary of his holy will for our lives – the Ten Commandments – our second reading tells us that Jesus knew full well that man was simply incapable of such obedience. He came to earth knowing exactly what we were like – knowing **"what was in man."** The mystery of the gospel is, in part, how Jesus loved the unlovable with a holy, sacrificial love. He didn't come because he thought we were good; he came because he knew that we were bad. He knew that as corrupt, spiritually dead human beings, we didn't need a guide to show us the path by which we could rescue ourselves, we needed a Savior.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn –457 (Red Hymnal)

"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

The Sermon – 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Foolish Wisdom of the Cross"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn –144 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 144 (Stanza 5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (40) Ave (41) Wednesday (25)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Caleb Schaller has returned the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI. Teacher Neal Bernthal is considering the call to Faith School of Markesan, WI. Teacher Paul Tiefel is considering the call to St John's School of Okabena, MN.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl was scheduled to be out of town this weekend visiting family, but those plans fell through. Our thanks, nonetheless, to the dedicated laymen who were prepared to bring us the Word of God this morning in the Pastor's absence.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday during the fellowship hour. As always, any questions or concerns should be directed to a Council member so that those items can be placed on the agenda for the upcoming meeting.

Time Change – A reminder that next Saturday night/Sunday morning is the dreaded "spring ahead" time to turn our clocks ahead one hour for Daylight Savings Time.

Offering Box – Comments regarding our change to an offering box have been universally positive. The only problem that has been mentioned is that members forget to drop their offering in the box. Please let a Church Council member know if you would like a weekly reminder and, if so, what form that reminder should take.