

‘FOOLISH OR WISE?’

I Corinthians 1: 18-31; Matthew 5: 1-12

You would think in reading the First Corinthians passage this morning that the writer was alive today! He is talking about power, wisdom, foolishness, strength, weaknesses. It, at least to me, is a description about the American way of life especially in recent years.

A few quotes:

Jews demand signs

Greeks desire wisdom

The power of God

The wisdom of God

It seems Paul is talking about the very struggles many of us have today. Who do you believe? What is the truth anyway? Where am I to put my trust and beliefs and faith? What makes sense anymore?

Just think of the past several years when everyone in this country was wondering what is wise and what is foolish. Just looking at the daily news (which many people no longer look at!), we are bombarded with different perspectives and biased opinions. And we do not know what to believe or what to do!

Think about local, state, and national politics. There are all kinds of problems on all sides. Whether you are a Republican or a Democrat. It matters not. There is a constant effort to get your attention. To get your loyalty. To get your vote!

The irony which makes no sense to many people is the message to Christians is “God chose the foolish in the world.” “God chose what is weak in the world,” verse 27. And the world wants what is wise, what is strong, and what is powerful.

Yet, the world talks about wisdom through political means of outfoxing the other party. We are told we need to be mighty and strong. We are encouraged to make America great again. And it all becomes part and parcel of what is best for me and mine! What makes me secure! What makes me rich! How can I get ahead and be a winner! Because no one likes a loser.

So, we are in a quandary. We call ourselves Christian. We also call ourselves Americans. And while I would hope the two labels could be compatible, I am beginning to wonder about that. I, like Paul, am not so sure they are compatible and can coexist with each other.

My reason for making such claims is because of Paul's words. Our proclamation is Christ crucified. How can you find meaning and purpose when your leader is crucified? How can you follow and place your trust in a criminal, found guilty, and sentenced to death?

How can we follow a God who chooses what is foolish to make the point? How can we follow a God who chooses weaknesses to make the point? What good is there in foolishness or in weaknesses? Such only becomes a spiraling downward cycle.

We proudly proclaim that with Christ's crucifixion, it becomes a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. How would anyone believe us?

And to top it off, God's disciples are the lowly and despised in the world according to verse 28. It becomes a complete reversal of what we think is normal and natural.

Our Christian faith is in complete contradiction to this world. It is in direct conflict with what we think is normal and natural. It questions everything which we do and how we live.

Which is rather disappointing and very troubling! For we are who we are because of what we believe. And yet I wonder if we might not clearly understand how radical the Christian Gospel really is.

Which is troubling for those of us who call ourselves Presbyterians. We are the upper crust of society. We are some of the richest people in the world. We are the elite of the world. Even when we will not admit to it.

For none of us has missed a meal recently. None of us are in poverty (though we often declare we don't have two nickels to rub together!). None of us live in our car or on the street. We are not the foolish in the world. We are not the weakest in society. So, what message is Paul saying to us? What was Paul saying to the Corinthians?

First of all, Paul is saying: **MAKE A CHOICE!** Are you on God's side or not? Can you agree that God calls us to seek the weak or the foolish in order to see his glory? Can we declare God is at work in places we could never imagine?

Could God be working through this congregation to reach out to people in this community who are not like us? People who are not here? People who need our love and care?

Can we be vulnerable enough to see God's hand at work in people and places we think are foolish? Can we be open to meeting the weak and downtrodden in our community so they can show and share with us who God is and how God works in their lives?

I've often thought that people without financial resources are more likely to know God because they have to lean on God's arms for they have nowhere else to lean! I have been enriched by African American friends whose God talk is real and is lived out faithfully. Who openly declare God got them through a rough time and show them a still more excellent way.

FIRST, we have to make a choice. Are we willing to see how God takes what people think are weaknesses to show his glory and praise? It means, I believe, we have to reorient ourselves from what we call "Christianity" as we currently practice it.

SECONDLY, if we chose Christ, we are declaring that what appears to be weak is the only way. We have to declare that the death and resurrection of Christ - - while looking weak - - is our real strength.

Translated means when we are feeling vulnerable and weak is an opportune time when God can speak to us. When we do not have the answers to a problem, be still and realize God is real. When we are in a quandary about a situation or about a person, chill. Allow God to work through you via your prayer life. Read scripture. Pray. Be still.

Usually we panic over a situation that we feel is a crisis. And as Type-A personalities, we need to fix the problem. NOW. Immediately. So, we begin listing all the possible outcomes.

Kind of reminds me of Mary and Martha. Martha was scurrying around the kitchen getting everything ready because there is a guest in the house. And Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet absorbing his teaching and presence.

Surely there are times when we need to get things done and we need to scurry. There are deadlines and requirements. No question. Yet I think we miss that deeper relationship with God by quickly solving a problem and suggesting a solution. Yet being still and knowing God could very well move us to a solution even quicker because we acknowledge the need for God's presence and leadership in our lives.

SECOND: welcome times of weaknesses as opportunities for God to be real.

FIRST: make your choice: God's ways or the world's ways.

FINALLY, claim the wisdom of God by exploring the foolishness of this world. I purposely paired our two scriptures today. The Matthew 5 passage is known as the Beatitudes. They are

blessings for us if we listen to and practice them. They help us to live out the purpose of the passage in I Corinthians.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Those of us who realize we do not need to be all knowing and powerful. We realize that humility is the new way of life, the Kingdom of Heaven. Because we realize we do not deserve the Kingdom. We realize it is a gift from God. Even though we do not deserve such a gift; yet, God provides.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN FOR THEY WILL BE COMFORTED. In our day, as well as in Corinth, buck up. No tears. Be tough. Be strong. Yet, what appears to be weakness to some is a gift about the one we loved and lost. It shows our humanity. It enables the Holy Spirit to provide real strength and comfort.

BLESSED ARE WHOSE WHO HUNGER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THEY WILL BE FILLED. If you desire a life that is fulfilling and full, focus on righteousness. Focus on justice. Focus on being equitable. Focus on enabling others to be the very persons God created them to be. For it is not about me...it is about how I can be available for someone else.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS FOR THEY WILL BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD. It is no fun trying to get two

people who are angry at each other to seek reconciliation. It is no fun to be the one in the middle who can see the shortcomings of both who are often blind. It is no fun when you are trying to bring peace among folks and then get blamed for being biased and prejudiced against one or the other. Yet that is what happens to one who is called a child of God. For did not Christ do the same through his death and resurrection? In order to change the world?

The Beatitudes remind us of being vulnerable and open to what the world calls weaknesses or foolishness. For many would wonder why would you waste your time?

Because we have a higher calling. We are about a new way of life. We are claimed by God through our baptism and therefore are committed to living in a new way.

First: Decide. Choose your way

Second: Be vulnerable. Be receptive to a new way to see life.

Third: practice a new way of life living out of your weaknesses.

Is it foolishness? Or is it wisdom?

Depends on your commitment and point of view. And what your relationship is with God.

Are you game?

I CORINTHIANS 1: 18-31

18. For the message about the cross is foolishness 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, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.

22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,

23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are,

29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

31 in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

MATTHEW 5: 1-12

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.