

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – 1 Cor 1:22-25 – God’s Foolish Wisdom – February 28th, 2016

The Christian religion really does seem like foolishness. A few months ago in catechism class I wanted to show the seventh graders what the Christian religion looks like to an outsider and so I took the perspective of an unbeliever and said, “So let me get this straight. God is angry with me because I’ve disobeyed him. And I deserve punishment for disobeying him. But it’s ok because 2,000 years ago a man named Jesus got the death penalty. And because he was executed as a criminal, I’m forgiven before God in heaven?” And one of the seventh graders said, “Well, when you put it like that, it does seem kind of foolish.” Imagine if someone came up to you on the street and said, “A convicted criminal was just executed. It was completely unjust. He was innocent. But because he was executed your sins are forgiven before God in heaven.” That’s how the message sounded when it was first preached. But today in our lesson Paul says that this message which seems like foolishness is actually God’s wise plan to save us.

Paul says in verse 22, **“Jews demand signs.”** In the past God had delivered the Jews through miraculous signs. How did God deliver the Jews when they were slaves in Egypt? Through miraculous signs. Think of all the miraculous signs Moses did! He turned his staff into a snake. He turned the Nile into blood. He brought plagues of hail and locusts and darkness. And finally the greatest sign of all: he split the Red Sea into two. The Jews thought that when the Messiah came, it would be another glorious deliverance like that. And who could blame them? That makes sense. But God had something else in mind. He would deliver them, not with a show of glory, but through the shame of the cross. Sometimes we have in mind that God is going to deliver us one way and instead he does something completely different.

Paul goes on: **“Greeks look for wisdom” (1 Cor 1:22).** The Greeks were famous for their intelligence. They had very intelligent philosophers, Maybe you have heard of Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. The Greeks took wisdom and intelligence very seriously. But the Christian message sounds like foolishness. I’m forgiven because God punished his Son instead of me? That’s sounds offensive to an intelligent person. God’s Son is innocent. Why sound he be punished for things he didn’t do?

“But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks” (1 Cor 1:23).

“Christ crucified” is actually an oxymoron. Do you know what an oxymoron is? It’s when two words are put together that mean opposite things. Like “jumbo shrimp.” Or “fire ice.” “Christ crucified” is an oxymoron. Because they expected the Christ to defeat the Romans. Their definition of the Christ was the one who would defeat the Romans. And crucifixion was what happened to people who were defeated BY the Romans. You could be the Christ or you could be crucified but you couldn’t be both. Saying Christ crucified is like saying “a loser-winner.” No wonder Christ crucified was a stumbling block to Jews.

Christ crucified is “foolishness to Gentiles.” Since for us in the 21st century the cross is a positive symbol. But for people at the time of Jesus and Paul, the cross was something that conveyed shock and horror and revulsion. We wear crosses on our necklaces. But imagine someone wearing a necklace with a little electric chair on it. Why would you make the electric chair the central part of your message? You can see why the cross would be foolishness to Gentiles.

“But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is stronger than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (1 Cor 1:24-25) People add everything up and they think that the message of the cross is completely stupid. God adds everything up and he thinks that the cross is great

wisdom. How can people and God come to such opposite conclusions? It would be like if two accountants appraised a business. And one accountant adds up all the figures and all the numbers and concludes that the company is extremely successful, a fortune five hundred company. And the other account adds up all the numbers and concludes that the company is completely bankrupt. People have added up all the numbers and concluded: As long as I'm a pretty good person God will let me into heaven. God adds up all the numbers and says, "Nobody is going to get into heaven unless I sacrifice my only Son Jesus." How can human beings and God come to such opposite conclusions?

Well, there are a few things that we human beings have not taken sufficient account of. First you've underestimated how big of a problem sin is. The theme of our service today is that God is serious about his word. God is serious when he says don't lust or hate or covet or gossip. In our appraisal of ourselves we have severely underestimated how many sins we've committed.

We've also severely underestimated the holiness of God. He doesn't grade on a curve. He doesn't let anything go. His holiness demands that he mete out full punishment for every single sin.

We've also severely overestimated how righteous we are. The Bible says there is no one who is righteous, not even one. God's law just completely decimates us.

But the last thing you've underestimated in your appraisal is how much Jesus loves you. Jesus loves you more than you could ever imagine.

God's law completely demolishes the towers of pride that we have built in our hearts, but only so that he can build the towers of his love. God's law silences us, but only so that we can hear him singing the song of his love. God's law erases all of our mathematical calculations, but only so that he can have a clean canvas on which to paint the picture of his love. And the picture that he paints is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Yes, God's law and his holiness must punish sin, but God unleashed his wrath on Jesus so that you could go free. Galatians chapter 3 says, "**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.**" (Galatians 3:13) That seems like a foolish message, "**but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**" (1 Cor 1:24) Amen.