

# Lent 2010 – We Preach Christ Crucified

## *"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 we enter this evening the sacred season of Lent – a time dedicated, on the one hand, to the special contemplation of our own sinfulness; and, on the other, to the contemplation of the suffering and death 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. To aid us in commemorating these truths, the theme for our meditations this Lenten season is "We Preach Christ Crucified." The text that will form the basis for our meditation this evening is found in 1 Corinthians, the First Chapter:

**1 Corinthians 1:18-25 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." <sup>20</sup> Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> Because 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, so we pray, **"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Fellow Christians:

The fact that you are hearing or reading this sermon indicates a good thing, for it is (hopefully) 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 – 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 the size of 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 evening told us that God's one and only path to heaven has been dismissed as foolishness for the past 2000 years – longer even. During our Lenten series this year it is our intention to focus on this foolishness, for we resolve – along with the Apostle Paul – to proclaim the simple message of Christ crucified. We do so fully aware that **“the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”**

Let's speak clearly and honestly here. Is the **“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. 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? The world believes just that. 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 doesn't fall short of man's wisdom but far transcends it. 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 explain to others. It is God alone who has given us the ability to sit quietly at his feet and learn from him – 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 it teaches us that we have a God who is infinitely wiser, smarter, 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, 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* lie beyond - and contradict – human reason.

We return to our text for this evening, where we read: ***For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."*** <sup>20</sup> ***Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?***

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

***"Where is the wise man"*** 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 charge, his duty and obligation, was to dispense justice for those he was called to rule, 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."* Huh? 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 farcical hand-washing and nonsensical proclamation that he is somehow thereby innocent of the blood of the man he is falsely condemning to death. Pilate's one and only goal was to preserve his office and his power, 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 wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"*** 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, is 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 request a sign."*** 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, descend 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. Therein we find eternal life. Therefore we resolve again this evening, according to the wisdom that God alone has given us, that we will continue to ***"preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."*** Amen!