

Love In World on Fire God's Foolishness Wins!

1 Cor 1:18-25, Luke 5:1-11

Good morning! How do we figure out what is wise and what is foolish? That topic seems to be on our minds a lot these days—about the pandemic, about the economy, about our society. Who is wise to listen to? Who is foolish? Those are important and urgent questions, but today we are looking at the value of God's *foolishness*. God's foolishness is wiser and more powerful than the wisdom of the world. God's foolishness is the ultimate wisdom and wins out in the end. God's foolishness wins!

When Alice and I decided to go for a hike yesterday it seemed like a good idea—a beautiful day, a quiet trail, flowers, lots of exercise. Then Alice took a hard fall on the way down. Suddenly our plan didn't seem so great. We're really grateful we were able to get off the mountain and back to the car without trouble. And extremely grateful that she wasn't hurt more badly. But by the time we got home Alice's knee wouldn't bear weight. She refuses to go to the ER on a busy weekend in the middle of a pandemic. So we are trying to discern what is wise and what is foolish as she recovers. Thankfully she is doing a little better this morning.

My main point today is about the value of God's foolishness over the world's wisdom. Of course the world's wisdom can help us in some areas—we should listen to our doctors! Even kids can have practical wisdom to share. That is kind of off topic, but I want to share a couple of them with you anyway: Patrick, age 10, said, "Never trust a dog to watch your food." Michael, 14, said, "When your dad is mad and asks you, 'Do I look stupid?' don't answer him." Eileen, age 8 said, "Never try to baptize a cat." That is pretty good advice!

But sometimes the world's wisdom leads us astray. It points us in exactly the wrong direction. This summer we have been looking at what love looks like in our world today. We've been seeing how Jesus' teachings apply in our lives now. The world's wisdom encourages us to write off Jesus' teaching as too idealistic and too impractical. Showing Mercy, like we talked about last week, is great. But the world's wisdom says shouldn't we look after our own first? Reaching out to people on the margins is nice, but the world's wisdom urges us to be sure to

protect our people. Can we really live these teachings out? Today's scriptures say yes we can! But to do it we are first confronted with a hard choice. Will we follow the wisdom of the world or will we risk following the foolishness of God. Following the wisdom of the world or the foolishness of God.

These questions aren't new-- Paul addresses them directly in our first reading. Listen again to the first verse we read: 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! I love how Paul says it is the power of God to us *who are being* saved. What a great reminder that God is at work in us, right now! And all through our lives. God wants to be in a relationship with us. That is why he made us—so we can be in a loving relationship with him, now and always. He doesn't just want to sell us a fire insurance policy to avoid hell and then never talk to us again. No! God's Spirit is always at work in us as we follow Jesus—it is a lifelong process of shaping us more and more into the people he made us to be. Ruth Graham, Billy Graham's wife, put this on her gravestone—"construction completed, thank you for your patience." Our life of faith is a long journey—a lifelong walk alongside our Savior.

Paul says that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world. He says that the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. Even God's foolishness is better for us than the world's wisdom.

Paul says he preaches Christ Crucified. The wisdom of the world rejects that whole idea. A crucified savior? A savior who can't even save himself? That doesn't make any sense! But the foolishness of God points towards the cross and calls us home. Paul says that the cross is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. The cross is a stumbling block for people today too. For the Jews any person who was hung on a pole was cursed by God. So the one thing that couldn't happen to a *real* messiah is crucifixion! Talking about a crucified messiah is a contradiction. For the gentiles crucifixion was the most shameful way to die. No one would boast about a crucifixion! The wisdom of the world would turn away from anyone who was crucified. You wouldn't even mention crucifixion in polite company.

But God's foolishness doesn't sweep the cross under the rug. No! God's foolishness shines a spotlight on the Cross. Jesus' crucifixion was a scandal. It should have been the end of

the Jesus movement. But instead it became the FOCUS for Jesus followers. The cross is not bad news; it is the very heart of the *good* news. In the long story of God's relationship with people—the Cross is unique. It is the hinge that history turns on. It is the lens through which everything else can make sense. Jesus getting crucified was NOT an unfortunate event, it was the *main* event! It is the Good news. This is how God chose to come and be with us. This is how God overcame our sin and defeated even death itself. The cross opens the way for us to be with God.

The world's wisdom says that a good God wouldn't let bad things happen. So why is this pandemic killing so many people? Where is God when someone has cancer or is in an accident? A key part of the answer to those questions is the Cross. No matter how bad things get for us, Jesus has been there—he shares our pain, our humiliation, even our death. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. And Jesus' way goes to the cross. Suffering is part of life, and Jesus is right there with us in it. As Eugene Peterson said, "It is comforting to know that I can never get beneath God. I can never get beneath God. Peterson continues: "Wherever I am, however low I get, he has been there and is with me there and is longing for fellowship with me there." Jesus is longing for fellowship with you right now. Right in the middle of your pain. The wisdom of the world may not understand that, but you can. Jesus is with you through it all.

Thanks to the cross we see God's power at work—at Easter, throughout history, and even in our lowest moments. Thanks to the Cross we see God's foolishness at work—taking the worst that the world can dish out and turning it into rescue and comfort for all of us. The foolishness of God is more powerful than we can possibly imagine!

In our Gospel story we see the power of God's foolishness lived out. Jesus is teaching in his home area, Galilee, and has attracted a big crowd. Jesus asks Simon Peter to take him out in a boat so more people can hear him. After he is done teaching, he tells Peter to put out into the deep water and drop his nets for fish.

Put yourself in Peter's shoes for a minute. Peter is a fisherman. This is his business; he's done it all his life. He KNOWS how to fish. The Sea of Galilee, or the Lake of Gennesaret as Luke calls it, is a lake about 13 miles long and 8 miles across. It is surrounded by hills. It is actually the lowest freshwater lake in the world, almost 700 feet below sea level. The fish in

this lake come up near the surface to feed at night. During the day they stay down deep in the cool water. That is why the fishermen fished at night. Peter had fished all night long and he'd caught nothing. He was cleaning his nets when Jesus asked this favor to use his boat as a pulpit. Now Jesus was asking Peter to sail back out into the deep, to drop his nets, get them dirty again, and all for nothing because everybody knows that the fish aren't near the surface during the day! The world's wisdom says don't take fishing advice from a carpenter!

But Peter decides to follow God's foolishness. Peter says "Because you say so, I will let down the nets." Jesus calls on Peter to follow, and he follows, even though Jesus' command seems foolish and impractical. Look at what happens! They *immediately* get nets full of fish! There are so many fish in the nets that they are starting to break. Peter is desperately signaling for his fishing partners, James and John, to come out in their boat and help. Even with the second boat there are so many fish that BOTH boats are filled so full that they are starting to sink!

God's foolishness delivers so much more than man's wisdom ever can! I love Peter's reaction to this—he fell down before Jesus and said "Go away from me, I'm a sinful man!" It is just like Isaiah's reaction when he saw God's glory fill the temple—"I shouldn't be here, I'm not worthy, I'm a sinful man." Peter recognized what was happening—he was seeing God's glory show up in this record haul of fish!

Are we seeing God's glory show up in our lives? In our jobs? In our work together as a congregation? I think often we don't see that kind of remarkable outcome because we aren't following Jesus' invitation. We are going after our own plans rather than listening to Jesus. If the fish aren't landing, maybe it is because we aren't fishing with Jesus.

The teachings of Jesus that we have been looking at this summer can sound foolish from the perspective of the world's wisdom—caring for the poor on our doorstep, inviting in those who are living on the streets, caring about the worth of each and every person like the good shepherd does, following the call to show mercy, even to those who are driving us crazy.

These teachings are hard. They sound impractical. We want so badly to explain them away so we don't have to change our own lives. But these teachings are the way of life that Jesus calls each of us to. Are we willing to follow God's foolishness like Peter did when he put

out into the deep? Or are we imprisoned by the world's wisdom? Frederick Buechner describes God's foolishness like this—"Worldly wisdom says things like 'Drive safely, the life you save may be your own.' But God says, 'the life you save is the life you lose.' In other words, the life you clutch, hoard, guard, and play safe with is in the end a life worth little to anybody, including yourself. Only a life given away for love's sake is a life worth living." Only a life given away for love's sake is a life worth living.

Jesus died a national disgrace. Condemned, cursed, penniless, homeless, friendless. By the world's standards he was a perfect fool. But he gave his life away for love's sake, for your sake, and changed the world. I don't think we can follow him without making a fool of ourselves too. At the end of our gospel reading, after showing the power of God's foolishness, Jesus says two things to these frightened fishermen. First, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid! Stepping away from the world's wisdom is scary. It seems impractical or even dangerous. But if you are with God, what is there to be afraid of? First Pres—let's risk walking with Jesus! Let's take the chance of putting out into the deep and letting down our nets, even when it seems pointless. Who knows what God could do with our obedience!

Jesus first reassures us-- don't be afraid. And his second point is to give us a job. He recruits Peter and us into his rescue mission! He says from now on you'll be fishing for people! Look at how Peter and Andrew and James and John respond to that call to service. They pulled up their boats on the shore and then walked away from them to go with Jesus. They walked away from all of their assets, from their way of making money, from their security. They went with Jesus. Buechner says there are two kinds of fools in the world, damned fools and what Paul called "fools for Christ's sake." What kind of fool do you want to be?

Friends—Jesus is calling. His teaching is clear but challenging. It seems foolish. The world's wisdom whispers its cynicism and hopelessness. Jesus' call is there for you. Every day, every hour, we face the same decision Peter did. Will we follow the way of God's foolishness? Do we trust Jesus enough to risk – our comfort? Our plans? Our security? The same Jesus who caused that amazing catch is calling us to trust him. Let's go out and be fools, for Christ's sake!

Let's pray: Lord Jesus—help us to trust you. Help us walk with you even when we can't see the way. Empower us to follow your foolishness rather than the so called wisdom of the world. Help us to be your fools, this day and every day! By the power of your Spirit and in your name we ask it, Amen!