

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Below are the readings and sermon for Sunday August 30, 2020. I hope they have reached you in good health and the Spirit of our Lord.

In Christ's Peace,

Pastor Steve

Readings

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

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. For it is written,

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

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? 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. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

John 1:1-18

The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Sermon

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord is the second movement of the Apostles Creed that lays out the foundational and missional framework in understanding the Christian faith.

No one likes to be called foolish. Whether it is a first century Corinthian or a Palm Beach County Florida resident. No one likes to be thought of as not being of sound mind. No one likes their judgement called into question. But here is Paul in the opening words of his letter to the Corinthians saying that there are those who see the cross of Jesus as being something foolish to try and comprehend. Which is funny to think because Emperors, Kings, Queens, the sun, the moon, golden calves and so on were in the belief system mix of the day. So what made believing in Jesus of Nazareth, the shoot from the stump of Jesse, a descendant of King David, who was predicted by the prophets, vouched for by John the Baptist, was named and identified by God in His wilderness baptism at the River Jordan, who performed compassionate act after act on the marginalized and scrutinized, calling out injustices and inequalities of the day...what made belief in Him seem foolish? Was His story *too* much to believe? Perhaps this divine interaction with humanity had gone too far. It is not atypical for the Holy to lower them self into this world to live as Jesus did. To

enter into this world, say the things He did, commit the acts he did, and then...knowing and going willingly to death on a cross is indeed *foolish*. Unheard of. Ridiculous then and maybe thought of as even more so today.

For many the story of a divine being, creating all that there is, then hanging around tending to its failures, and rejoicing in its life-giving reparations and successes is a hard pill to swallow. The arguments are plenty...*Why do bad things happen to good people? Why doesn't "God" just correct what is wrong with a divine finger snap? Why is there death and dying, babies crying, people protesting, looting and arresting? Why? Disease...starvation? Foolish!* And thus what is thought to be foolish is ignored, disregarded, or perhaps mock.

Friday night I was in the company of handful of guys at a local muscle car shop. At the end of the workday on Friday's the shop puts down their tools and pick up a beer and settle into a session of chewing the fat. As the late afternoon became early evening and there were fewer of us, the conversation shifted into a higher gear. One of the guys was sharing a health concern and how he knows that God will take care of it. God has seen him to where he is today and there is no reason to disbelieve God will drop the ball now. Was a great testimony. Towards the end of his testimony a fella who was doing some shop electrical work had made his way to the table where the last few of us was congregating. The guy who was sharing his testimony turned to electrician guy and said, "Do you believe?" Talk about being forward. Not only did the guy respond no, "I am not a believer", but he joke about how he was going to give the devil hell himself when he got there. Straight faced as ever he said, "Devil is gonna have his hands full when I show up." Seconds later he would leave. Leave quick. It was obvious this was not a conversation he wanted to enter into. He was uncomfortable. Lord know's what is on that guy's heart and mind. What would have him own such a statement; have him feel that distant from being good? What has he done or experienced that has him make such a resolute statement and high tail it out of there to avoid any more of the religious talk? Jesus talk, is likely "foolish" to him.

To arrive at the ability to confess that you, "*believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord*" is not the work of an individual but is the work of the Holy Spirit upon them. By way of the created world, the Holy Spirit reveals the hidden God's love for us. *Not too much about the Holy Spirit today. More on the third person of the Trinity in next week's sermon.* God's love for us, is revealed to us through the created world, through God's creation...through nature, but more importantly through you and I.

Now although he did not say much, the fellow at the muscle car shop had more to say. He has questions to ask? He probably has grievances to air out. Hopefully someone gets to follow up with him. Hopefully somewhere along his way someone will tease out of him more than a sarcastic remark about himself and hell. To me, the fact that he was uncomfortable meant a number of things. It meant that he did have something to say. His being uncomfortable said that he should be pursued. Jesus reminds us that he did not come for the righteous/the healthy/those who got it together (whatever that is?). Not at all. He said, *I have come for the sinners. I am here for those who run from me. I am here for those who curse me. I am here for those who don't yet believe in me. I am here for those who abuse themselves. I am here for those who abuse others. I am here for the sick of heart, mind and soul. In the love of my very wise Father I am here to pursue the foolish. I am here for every last one of you!*

Before Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary...and before He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried...and before he descended to the dead, arising to life on the third day...And before he ascended into heaven, where He now sits at the right hand of the Father, from which he will come to judge the living and the dead...Before any of that Jesus was. The Son has always been. Jesus Christ, this perfect expression of humanity and love has always been.

Those first 17 verses of John we heard a few minutes ago are beautiful. We often hear them on Christmas Eve. I'll never forget how Mike Cross of St. Paul Lutheran in Hampton, IA read them my first Christmas Eve as their pastor in 2012. The tenor of his voice was fantastic. He was a litigation lawyer. Great voice. The lighting in the sanctuary was just so. There may have even been snow falling. Either way, as Mike read those deeply theological words of John, the creation story, and Jesus the Word and Light of God connected in a powerful way for me. That is God's timing. That is the living Word, always seeking to create and connect to us. From creating the light, to giving us the light, God's very logic and wisdom in Jesus Christ came here, to earth...to die on a shame-ridden cross at the city dump. Foolish to some, powerful act of love for those whose hearts and minds have dared their soul to reach for the God who reaches for them in Jesus. Jesus is the conduit that connects us to God. Jesus is the means by which we truly can come to know the depth and breadth of God's love for us. God entered into our world of pain and sin by taking on skin, knowing temptation, knowing anger, knowing disappointment, knowing rejection...suffering on our behalf, suffering more than us.

That is the story. That, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that all who believe may not perish but may have eternal life. In God's infinite wisdom the appeal for **your** eternal life was the death of Jesus. God intimately knew the pain of the cross so that you may know what it is to live without guilt...and so that you may know how to forgive...God intimately knew the pain of the cross so that you may tell of how intense his love is. God did this so that when someone says they, "I am not a believer" and then makes like the wind to leave, you invite them to have a beer and *say more about that*. Last but not least, God did not come into this world for himself, but for us. The life, the death and the resurrection was for us. Not to satisfy a need of God to be right, to be vindicated as all powerful. No! The life, the death and resurrection was God's way of saying I am all loving, and all this is for the needs of creation to be renewed made whole. This is for you.

I conclude with this thought...This past March, on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma AL, the late US. Rep. and Civil Rights Activist John Lewis, said this about doing what is right, "Get in good trouble, necessary trouble..." I believe this was the prevailing wisdom of God in coming to earth, being born of the virgin Mary, suffering under Pontius Pilate, being crucified, dying, and buried; descending to the dead. Rising from the dead; and then ascending into heaven, and now sitting at the right hand of the Father, until he comes to judge the living and the dead. *Good trouble. Necessary trouble.* We encounter the living God, when we trouble ourselves with one another. We encounter the living God when we lean in and love. We encounter the living God when we dare to care. When your worldly thought says *not my concern, not my worry...* but then for some reason your soul speaks up and says listen, look, behold...be present here, or there...feed them...clothe them...water them...pray for them...go to them...that is the light of God shining right through you. It is the kind of light that just might lead someone to shed the wisdom of this world and not walk away, but instead say "Hey, tell me more about that man Jesus. He's the son of God, and God? His death was for me? How does that work?" Amen.