

Pastor T.C. Arnold
5th Sunday after Trinity
1 Corinthians 1:18-25
July 4th, 2010

In the summer of 2004, in his family's back yard, Matthew Wyatt was enjoying one of his last days home before deploying to Iraq. It would be his second tour. Cpl. Wyatt was one of those brave young men, twenty-one years old, who volunteered to go back because, he was single, able, and loved to serve his country. A couple of days after that gathering of family and friends he was about to leave home again – and he told his mother something that brought chills down her spine – and would have for any mother. He told his mother, “I don't think I'm going to be coming home.” To some, those words are terrifying. To others, words such as those are foolishness.

On December 3rd of that same year Cpl. Wyatt was standing guard at the gate of a Marine base in the Al Anbar Province of Iraq. As was reported by eye-witnesses, a vehicle approached the gate entrance at a high rate of speed. Something was not right. Cpl. Wyatt, fully armed and fully loaded had to think quickly and decisively. He began to fire at the approaching vehicle which turns out was driven by enemy forces. Cpl. Wyatt fired into the windshield and killed the driver. The vehicle veered off-course, right towards Cpl. Wyatt. The vehicle, coming close to Wyatt didn't make it much further before exploding. It was a suicide bomber aiming his weapon right at the gate in the hopes of crashing through and causing multiple military casualties.

Marine Cpl. Matthew Wyatt was killed that day protecting his fellow soldiers. He was killed doing his job. He was killed serving his country. Matthew Wyatt is a hero. Matthew Wyatt was exactly where he thought he would be – where he wanted to be. He died the way he thought he would die. He died doing a job he believed needed to be done. He died and he knew he had a good chance of doing just that – and he took that chance in the midst of all the danger. He did it proudly. And yet there are many who will say – it was all foolishness.

There are many foolish things that happen in this world. Sometimes we are a part of such things. Maybe we mean to be – or – perhaps it's an accident. Some will say one thing is foolish and yet others will say that it is not. No matter what it is, many will say that dying senselessly is foolish. Most all of us would say this. But not everyone will agree on what is defined as senseless. To some dying in a war is senseless. To others it's the price for freedom.

Senseless dying has always been a matter of significance. For those that St. Paul was referring to in 1 Corinthians chapter one, believing in a powerful and almighty God that would die such a humiliating death is foolishness. In the ESV translation it calls it “folly” – but it's the same thing – foolishness/folly. *“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing...” “But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.”* It's folly to those who do not believe because to have such a faith in that kind of God – a God who dies on a cross – is senseless. Or, at least, so it is thought.

So then, what would be a “sensible” faith? If faith in a God who dies is senseless, what would be reasonable? Well, Paul says that the reasonable, rational religion is a religion that includes “wisdom”. In short, wisdom means a deep understanding. And, for many, a deeper understanding of what could possibly be productive for life today and life eternal would not include the preaching of a God who dies on a cross. That's foolishness. Preaching and believing in a God who dies on a cross will not help you. All this seems to promote is weakness and tragedy. Why have faith in such things as this? We can get where we need to go with seeking wisdom and understanding in what life gives. And for the past 2000 years, our world hasn't really changed much.

Perhaps you have traveled down an older, more established street in our city and seen the signs on the outside of buildings that say “Taro Card Reading” or “Fortune Telling.” Some seek understanding from spiritual forces other than the Holy Spirit. They seek “greater understanding” through cards and crystal balls. Some invest much time and money in gurus who say they can lead

people to seek wisdom where it is to be found and to find clarity where confusion exists. Recently there was a report that Frank McCourt, the owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers, was paying some sort of eastern religious/philosopher more than \$150,000 a year to simply “think” about the Dodgers which would certainly bring the Dodgers more success. Today, just like in the day of St. Paul, there was much seeking out of wisdom through godless means.

The world holds on to the foolish things. This is why Paul said in to the church in Corinth, “*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.*” Their wisdom and discernment was misplaced. Rather, the placement of wisdom is to be on that which seems folly to the unbeliever. It’s to be on that which seems weak. It’s on that which dies. “*We preach Christ crucified – a stumbling block to the Jews and folly/foolishness to the Gentiles.*” To preach Christ crucified does not seem wise – but it is. This foolishness of preaching a Savior who died in your place – in total submission to the Heavenly Father – is our one constant business of Gospel proclamation.

Today as in the day of Jesus and St. Paul, wisdom was sought through reason and debate. But this is the folly of wisdom. True wisdom is the Word of God itself. This Word focuses our life on the cross where Jesus made it all happen for us. On that foolish tree of death Jesus took all that could ever be imagined or understood and made it plain to us. He shed His blood and covered all our sin, our doubt and our weaknesses. His weaknesses that day on Calvary meant our victory over sin, death, and condemnation. Preaching Christ the crucified is our business which makes us wise unto salvation. The world cannot understand this. And so we preach and we witness to others about this fact. And still it will seem like foolishness to those who don’t believe or those who refuse to believe. But God help us to never stop preaching and teaching God’s true witness – a crucified Christ for the life of the world.

This Christ the Savior is folly/foolishness to the world. And Paul says that to the Jews, this Christ is a stumbling block. Well, that’s what the ESV and many other translations say. That’s not what the original says, however. The word Paul uses in verse 23 is *σκανδαλον*. The proper rendering is not “stumbling block” but rather, specifically speaking, a stick of a trap to which the bait is fixed and by which the trap is sprung. In other words, it means “deathtrap.” Christ and His crucifixion is a deathtrap to those who do not believe that His death was a saving work. It’s a deathtrap because those who do not believe in the one way to heaven will not go to heaven. That is why our witness to this saving fact of “Christ crucified” is so important.

And speaking of deathtraps – I’m not sure Cpl. Matthew Wyatt had a way out that day of December in 2004. Actually, yes he did. He could have run. But if he did that, he would have been doing the very opposite of what he was called to do – serve and protect. I imagine if he had ran away he would have went against everything he believed was right. So he didn’t. He stayed in that deathtrap and did his job. He got to that suicide bomber with his bullets before the bomb got inside the camp.

On this Independence Day, remember that we have the freedom to worship the one true God because of faithful men like Matthew Wyatt. And I can attest to his life in heaven as well. He was faithful to his Savior Jesus. I was blessed with the opportunity to serve him that summer, while he was home, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Millstadt, IL. Being strong enough to take on life for others is not weakness. It wasn’t that way for Matthew. It wasn’t that way for Jesus and for you either. What seems like foolishness to the world is actually your great heavenly gain. God bless your Independence Day. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen