

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
1 Corinthians 1:18-25  
July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Preaching is foolish! Why do it? Statistically most people in the world think so. They could care less about it. They find other things to occupy their time on Sunday morning. Even today, we will have only about 1/3 of the members of our parish family here to listen to preaching... to hear God's Word... to receive the Blessed Sacrament. Preaching must be foolishness if no one wants to hear it. Or, as the ESV says in the Epistle for today: folly.

In 2016, 5.6 Billion dollars were given to charitable organizations. This is actually down from the previous year when 7 Billion was given out. Phil Knight, co-found of Nike led the way. He gave \$900 million dollars, mostly to his beloved alma mater, the University of Oregon. Second was New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. This multi-billionaire gave away \$600 million. Down the list a few is John Arnold (no relation, unfortunately), a Hedge Fund manager who gave away a mere \$183 million... small potatoes.

Just try to imagine all of this money. Suppose someone in our community offered each family that lives anywhere close a million dollars, no strings attached, to attend our church today. I'm sure people would be skeptical. Maybe they would think this is a trick that only a fool would fall for. But I would imagine it would be safe to say that there would be a line out our door reaching beyond the street waiting for their certified check. It would not take long, once the action started, before hundreds, even thousands would flock here to claim such a wonderful prize.

And it's hard to believe, maybe the world would think only a fool would believe... but it's true... that from this pulpit is preached a gift that far exceeds the buying power or security of a million dollars. A word that has nothing to do with the man preaching it. A word that brings with it more than billions could buy for you... and is yet what the world shuns as mere folly.

This is the reaction of so many who spurn the preaching of the cross of Christ. It's foolishness. It's folly. Others just look at the season and try to find a more convenient time to receive God's precious gifts. Millions perish in despair, yearning for some unfound fortune when the wealth of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life is freely offered through the preaching of the cross. This epistle reading appointed for this day in 1 Corinthians directs our hearts to this "foolish preaching."

Our Tuesday morning Bible class began studying 1 Corinthians a couple of weeks ago. Our first lesson was to learn about what the city of Corinth was all about. We know that this Greek town was steeped in worldly attitudes. Corinth was a regional center for various sporting events, for travelers who came by land and by sea, and was segmented into those who lived in extreme poverty and those who had great wealth. Many of those who had a great deal to spend were steeped in gaining worldly goods or attaining the pleasures of this world. And now this new message about a man who is also God who would die on a cross for the sins of the world comes before them. It would be heard and debated like most every philosophical notion posed to man in that part of the world. But it was simply one message among many... not to be taken too seriously. It's just folly if you take it too seriously. Those folks typically ignored the many and various gods of the cultures that converged on that place on a daily basis anyway. What's one more among so many?

Yet Paul did not avoid confrontation. He knew there would be skepticism. He met it head on and addressed what others would think is foolish. The Greek word for foolish is "moros"... or sometimes "moron". Indeed to those who could care less about the cross of Jesus Christ and what the Savior did for the sake of the sins of the world... they would think it to be "moronic."

But the cross is anything but “moronic”. It is what Paul says, the power of God to those who are being saved. Paul takes a quote from the prophet Isaiah and says, “*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.*” All those who think they know better should keep their eye on that cross... on that foolish tree set between two criminals on Good Friday. They should behold Calvary’s mount and know that that place is a holy place, more sacred than all the temples built to behold the false gods of Greece and the surrounding world. What seems to be folly to the world is that which actually saves. Blood from a Savior is grander than anything this world could ever imagine to be wise and prudent.

Today wisdom and knowledge are important in every walk of life, whether obtained through experience or through “book learning.” We admire people with smarts... either if they have a great education or a have gained great experience far beyond what we have learned. We desire and admire such things. But few Christians desire wisdom gathering from God’s Word. That always seems to be way down on our list of things to attain. Oh we do the necessary things... bring the kids to the font of Holy Baptism. Bring them to Vacation Bible School. But this wisdom is more than just for our kids, it is also for us to have as well. We forget that our growth in God’s eternal wisdom will foster the growth in others around us as well. We lead by example. Perhaps if we do, others will want it for themselves as well.

A man will spend weeks and years perfecting a better hunting method. Someone else will cook and bake time and time again in order to make the most desirable dish around. How are we doing with attaining God’s eternal wisdom from His word as compared to our hobbies... the things we are the most passionate about? What is your priority?

But what is important to us... what should be the most important is the most important for all. This foolish preaching today... you know... the preaching about the cross of Jesus and how He died there for the forgiveness of your sins, is actually what the world needs. It doesn’t need a million dollars to come to church, though I know all of you would think that would be so nice. No, rather, we need this word... “*Salvation comes from no one else.*” (Acts 4). In this darkened world we are to take this “foolish” message because it is the “*power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes,*” out to the world. What would seem like a foolish treasure... a child in the manger... a man from Nazareth... a king who does not live in a palace and shows him to be the one true and wise gift above all gifts. The preaching of the cross is what we need and what the world needs because by this message... by Jesus and His blood shed for us, we are saved.

And it is by God’s grace that we have had this foolishness of the cross poured into our lives through the waters of Holy Baptism. It is nurtured by what the world will call foolish in the Word and Sacrament as God’s people gather here to be strengthened during our most difficult days... our most challenging moments. If in our personal life we have neglected the preaching, if we have not consistently lived as God’s redeemed people, if we have not shared the message of salvation as eagerly as we ought, God pours out His blood, His life, His ever-present comfort for the sinner and for the broken hearted. He died for all, and He died for you and you are not foolish for desiring this more than a million dollars.

And I will be honest, a million would sound pretty nice to this guy right about now. But only a fool would choose it over redemption in Christ. That’s what the world does. That’s what is tempting for us too. Come to where He pours out eternal wisdom and grace. This place is for you. This place gives out the best gifts... your undeserved forgiveness that comes with a promise of eternal life in heaven. Amen.

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