

We Preach Folly

Third Sunday in Lent [b]

March 4, 2018

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ 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? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

In the Name of Jesus.

We preach what the world cannot hear, does not want to hear, and is offended to hear. But this preaching which the world is offended to hear, is used by the Lord to confront the world, to confront the sinner, and to do the work our Lord wants to do toward the world and toward the sinner.

We preach Christ crucified. An offense to our world and to every sinner. A message so unreasonable it is folly.

Preaching is strange. Sales pitches, marketing schemes, training programs, motivational seminars, our world does not find these strange. They offend no one.

A sales pitch may bother us, if it comes over our phone at an inconvenient time, but it doesn't offend. Because, a sales pitch treats me as a person with a free will, it asks me to enter into a decision to buy something that will help my life.

A marketing scheme speaks to me as one who is a free agent able to make decisions. It respects what I need and it comes to me with a package, whether it's a better way to protect my home or an improved way to buy a car, or whatever—it gives me a way by which I can improve my situation.

A training program or motivational seminar asks me to join in a proven system which will strengthen me, whether physically or in my skills, so that I can perform better in life. It treats me as someone who has a say in what I will do to improve myself.

None of these offend. They are not folly to our world. They are expected, even needful. But the preaching of the cross offends and is folly. It must offend, it must be counted as folly. Because, the preaching of the cross doesn't allow me to do anything. It doesn't treat me as a free agent who can do something to improve myself or change my life. It doesn't come at me trying to get me to make a decision. It doesn't let me participate in what it is doing.

It's just the preaching of the cross. It's the proclamation of a fact. It's bringing news of something that has been accomplished in history and is now, in the word of that preaching, being brought to me. But it's being brought to me as nothing but gift. As an accomplished fact that, in complete grace, God is bringing to me and including me in—his decision, his choice, not mine.

The preaching of the cross leaves me with nothing of my own to bring to the table for my own benefit. Not my own efforts, not my own decisions or choices, not my own obedience to a program or dedication to a system, not even my own acceptance. The preaching of the cross leaves me as nothing but recipient.

And my sin refuses to put up with that. My sinful flesh is offended to be put in a position of being able to do nothing to justify self. It is folly to my rationality, which demands to say that if God is saving me, it must be, on some level anyway, that he is saving me because he saw something in me deserving saving. But the preaching of the cross rules that out. Because, preaching is simply the proclamation of an accomplished fact, and the delivery of that fact to me as gift.

It would be like speaking to a child. If you say to a child, *Here's some ice-cream, I will give it to you if you do your homework*, that's not preaching, it's a sale, it's a transaction requiring payment.

If you say to a child, *Let me show you how to get some ice-cream by mowing the yard and being respectful*, that's not preaching, but a motivational seminar, motivating the child to do something and showing how it will make his life better, with ice-cream.

But if you say to a child, *Here's some ice-cream, I give it to you, it's yours, go for it*, that's gift. It's not a sale or transaction, not a tool of motivation, it's purely the statement of a fact—*here's some ice-cream*, and a delivery of that fact as a gift to the child—*it's yours, go for it*. That's gift. It's preaching. It's the proclamation of something undeserved but purely and completely declared and given.

We preach Christ crucified. No sale, no motivational seminar, nor self-improvement program, but an offense, folly to our world, but to those who are being called, the power and wisdom of God unto salvation.

Because, preaching is the way God has chosen to bring salvation to the sinner, who is always only recipient of grace.

This proclamation of the fact of the cross and the accomplishment on the cross of the redemption of the sinner—this proclamation is the way God has appointed for sinners to be gathered into his Church. Our world will never understand this, even though through this preaching God is coming into our world and gathering people into his church out of the world. And our own sinful flesh will never understand this, instead wanting to find God in a way that will let us participate in the work of salvation by making a decision or working for changed lives, but all the while, through the preaching of the cross, God is coming to us, bringing gifts, treating us as only recipients of his grace, calling us into his church, and making us his people.

1 Corinthians 1:18ff:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ 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? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what

is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

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