

# "God's Views on Foolishness"

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

*What language shall I borrow  
To thank Thee, Dearest Friend,  
For this Thy dying sorrow,  
They pity without end?  
Oh make me Thine forever!  
And should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never,  
Outlive my love for Thee. (TLH 172)*

Dear Fellow Christians, synonyms are supposed to be words from the same language that have the same, or nearly the same, meaning. The reality is that most synonyms have a hierarchy – a natural order that we assign to them. Terrible, horrible, and horrific are all synonyms, but through usage we all naturally come to understand that they really aren't interchangeable. While you might say something like, "I had a terrible time changing the flat tire on my car," I doubt you would describe something like that as *horrific*. In fact every generation seems to adopt both best and worst when it comes to synonyms. Right now, clearly "horrific" has been adopted as the pinnacle of bad. Try to find a newscaster or politician that doesn't describe some tragedy as "horrific." They've learned that to use just about any other synonym would be to risk being accused of not caring as much as they should. On the other hand, the best of the best now seems to be "amazing." It used to be "awesome," but the poor word got over-used, nearly to death, and is now convalescing in a dictionary somewhere.

The problem with the ever-shifting hierarchy of synonyms is that it can rob us of our understanding of how God uses words. Think, for example, of the current hierarchy of words we use to describe that which is "unwise." My sense is that the current progression is something like silly, foolish, stupid, idiotic, insane. The result is that when the Bible describes something as "foolish," we unconsciously adopt a less than accurate view of how God views foolishness. We get the impression that while it's not good, it evidently it's not the worst either. That text that will guide us to a better appreciation of God's views on both foolishness and wisdom this morning is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the First Chapter:

**ESV 1 Corinthians 1:18-25** *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.* <sup>19</sup> *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and*

*the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."* <sup>20</sup> *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?* <sup>21</sup> *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.* <sup>22</sup> *For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,* <sup>23</sup> *but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,* <sup>24</sup> *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* <sup>25</sup> *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

These are the verbally inspired words of our God. Trusting that our God will once again bless us through the study of these words, and treasuring them above all earthly wealth, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

The fact that you are hearing or reading this sermon indicates a good thing, for that is almost certainly an indication that you understand your own spiritual needs and acknowledge the value and benefit of God's Word. Part of Christian growth and maturity is learning to appreciate not just what our God has done for us in the past, but what he continues to give us whenever we gather in his name and meet with him in his Word. It is learning to regard time in the Word not as a burden or irritation that must be endured, but to see it as a God-given opportunity for comfort, growth, and strengthening – an oasis in a parched and arid spiritual wasteland.

The world takes the exact opposite view. The world increasingly views religion as an annoyance, and worship services as irritating disruptions. They tend to regard such gatherings as quaint throwbacks to a less enlightened era, and therefore as more or less a waste of time. There is, after all, so much to do and only so much time to get it all done...

In a word, society regards all this "religion stuff" as just so much foolishness. Are they right? Let's look at their track record. There have been other examples of "foolishness" condemned by this and former societies. Not that long ago it was pure foolishness to imagine that human beings could just walk up to a door and have it open all on its own. Foolishness to imagine that man could fly at all, let alone that 250 full grown adults with all their luggage walk onto a machine that would carry them 500 miles an hour 30,000 feet *in the air* across an ocean in quiet safety and comfort. Foolishness to imagine that

man would walk on the moon. Foolishness to imagine that doctors could remove a heart from a recently deceased human being and to place it into the chest cavity of another human being, hook everything up, and have that heart start functioning normally again. Utter foolishness to imagine that a majority of our citizens could walk around with a device half the size of a deck of cards that would allow them to communicate instantly with every other person who has a similar device anywhere in the world, or to use that device to close a garage door, adjust the temperature in their home, or to see who is at their door.

You get the point. The fact that this or any other society regards something as foolish really doesn't tell us anything. They've been wrong before; they will be wrong again.

Nothing much new here. Our text for this morning told us that God's one and only path to heaven has been dismissed as foolishness for the past 2000 years – longer even. Yet at all times, and especially during the season of Lent, we focus on this foolishness, for we resolve – along with the Apostle Paul in our text – to proclaim the simple message of Christ crucified. We preach the cross, and we do so fully aware that **“the word of the cross is folly (foolishness) to those who are perishing.”**

Let's speak clearly and honestly here. Is the **“word (message) of the cross”** foolishness? As far as man is concerned, of course it is. Christians, on the other hand, know such things as “mysteries of the faith.” The world around us will never know them as such. They will always and only judge everything like **“the message of the cross”** according to the standard of their own intelligence and reason. With that as their only guide, the message of Jesus Christ crucified will always be foolishness.

Our response? **“Why stop there?”** The fact is for every one apparent inconsistency, contradiction, or “foolishness” that the world can identify, Christians could identify ten others. Why stop at the foolishness of the cross. What about the fact that we claim to have one God, but then speak of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – each of which are fully God? That is, at minimum, bad math. We also teach and believe that Jesus was fully God and fully human at the same time. That's bad physics. Jesus is in heaven, but he is also everywhere else. That's bad geography. So also Jesus is eternal (has no beginning and no end) and yet he was conceived and born 2000 years ago. Jesus took part in the creation of all things, yet he himself became a part of his own creation when he was born of a virgin woman. God cannot die, yet on Good Friday Jesus (true God) died. God is merciful and forgiving, and yet God

is perfectly just and therefore demands payment in full for every single sin.

How do we reconcile or explain such things? Is it because Christians are dumber, more ignorant, or more naïve than others in our society? To the world that's pretty much it, but you and I believe such foolishness because God the Holy Spirit has identified these things to us as divine wisdom. He thereby gave us an insight that far transcends man's wisdom. It is the Holy Spirit who worked a spectacular miracle in the heart of every single Christian. That miracle allows us to be at peace with divine truths that we cannot fully comprehend, let alone logically explain. It is God alone who has given us the ability to sit quietly at his feet and to learn divine truth from him. It is God who allows us to **“be still, and know that He is God.”** He taught us not only to *believe* such things, but to wholeheartedly embrace them and to be profoundly comforted by them.

How could we ever be comforted by that which we cannot fully comprehend or explain? Because God's Word teaches us that we have a God who is infinitely wiser, more powerful, and more knowledgeable than we are. We are comforted in knowing that we have a God who comprehends what we cannot – not just the “big picture” but the *whole* picture of all human existence.

In fact how demoralizing to cling to a god that knows no more than we can know. How discouraging to have to rely on some “divine entity” that is capable of no more than we are capable of. How disturbing to worship a god that comprehends no more than we can comprehend. *That* is the sort of foolishness that natural man embraces. Our God has given us the privilege of seeing more, and of knowing that which we could never know on our own. He has given us *divine wisdom*, and such sublime truths *often* exist beyond - and contradict – human reason.

We return to our text for this morning, where we read: **For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”** <sup>20</sup> **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?**

Here we begin to grasp how important it is that we understand how God both defines and views “foolishness” and obviously then also “wisdom.” When God uses foolishness in this context, he is not

referring to trivial matters of little real consequence. He is talking about the difference between hell and heaven. He is talking about the pinnacle of bad or worst.

In this the unbelieving world has unwittingly come to our aid. Where once, not that long ago, they only ventured tentatively onto the thin ice of the ridicule of God and the Christian faith, they have now become evermore brazen in their ridicule and condemnation. Where once they only tapped on the ice with the testing foot, now they jump up and down with the full weight of their ridicule and condemnation. Where once they laughed in their sleeve, now they broadcast to the world their full, unrestrained derision and condemnation. This transition from guarded ridicule to open derision and scorn actually helps us. The subtle mockery of the past blurred the lines between faith and unbelief, between the children man and the children of God. Their new-found boldness and open derision leave no doubt. Where once we might have foolishly imagined that we could be both “of the world” and Christian, they have now removed any foolish thought of compromise or alliance. Our only interaction can be to humbly and lovingly win them over by the power of God’s Word, boldly and uncompromisingly shared.

The world has clearly chosen foolishness. Our reaction? Give us God’s wisdom! Man’s “wisdom” (that which God regards as the ultimate foolishness) called for Jesus to abandon his mission and thereby to sentence all of humanity to eternal torment. In direct contradiction to the collected wisdom of the world, our Lord, our Savior, held unwaveringly to God’s wisdom, which was the path to the cross. Thank God that he did, for therein we find more than just wisdom. There we find forgiveness and life, for there Jesus paid what he did not owe for us, who owed what we could not pay – and therein we find eternal life. By grace, through faith, God credits Jesus’ perfection to each of us. God’s wisdom was to provide forgiveness to each of us through the life and death of his own Son. The foolishness of man is to base his hope for salvation on his own thoughts, how own wisdom, his own works or goodness. God views all of that as more than just “silly” or “unwise.” He knows it for exactly what it is – the guarantee of eternal damnation in hell.

Therefore we resolve again this morning, according to the wisdom that God alone has given us, that we will continue to ***“preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”*** Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Exodus 20:1-17** And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <sup>3</sup> "You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. <sup>7</sup> "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. <sup>8</sup> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. <sup>12</sup> "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>13</sup> "You shall not murder. <sup>14</sup> "You shall not commit adultery. <sup>15</sup> "You shall not steal. <sup>16</sup> "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. <sup>17</sup> "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 2:23-25** Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup> and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Third Sunday in Lent – March 7, 2021

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 158 (Red Hymnal)

"Glory Be to Jesus"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Epistle Lesson:** (Exodus 20:1-17) God gave the Ten Commandments as a summary of the perfection he requires of every human being. Jesus alone kept them perfectly. Now those same Commandments serve as a perfect summary of God's will for Christians who want to thank him for the forgiveness that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is ours, and as we walk the path to heaven we seek to thank our God by our obedience to His holy will. How fitting then to be reminded of our God's will.

## Psalm 51 (Supplement page 31) (Brown Hymnal)

**The New Testament Lesson:** (John 2:23-25) Having heard God's perfect summary of his holy will for our lives – the Ten Commandments – our second reading tells us that Jesus knew full well that man was simply incapable of such obedience. He came to earth knowing exactly what we were like – knowing **"what was in man."** The mystery of the gospel is, in part, how Jesus loved the unlovable with a holy, sacrificial love. He didn't come because he thought we were good; he came because he knew that we were bad. He knew that as corrupt, spiritually dead human beings, we didn't need a guide to show us the path by which we could rescue ourselves, we needed a Savior.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 151 (Stanzas 1-3, 7) (Red Hymnal)

"Christ, the Life of All the Living"

## The Sermon – 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"God's Views on Foolishness"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 159 (Red Hymnal)

"Go to Dark Gethsemane"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 52 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty Father Bless the Word"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance – Sunday (32) Average (30) Wednesday (22)

### This Week at St. Paul:

|                    |                    |                                       |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Today</b>       | <b>-9:00 a.m.</b>  | – Sunday School and Bible Class       |
|                    | <b>-10:00 a.m.</b> | – Worship Service                     |
|                    | <b>-11:00 a.m.</b> | – Fellowship Hour                     |
| <b>Wednesday</b>   | <b>-5:45 p.m.</b>  | – Confirmation Class                  |
|                    | <b>-7:00 p.m.</b>  | – Midweek Lenten Service              |
| <b>Next Sunday</b> | <b>-9:00 a.m.</b>  | – Sunday School and Bible Class       |
|                    | <b>-10:00 a.m.</b> | –Worship Service w/Holy Communion     |
|                    | <b>-11:15 a.m.</b> | – Fellowship Hour                     |
|                    | <b>-7:30 p.m.</b>  | – ILC Tour Choir Concert in Jamestown |

**CLC News** – Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich have submitted a call for a seminary graduate, as has Redeemer of Cheyenne. There will be one seminary graduate this year and two teaching program graduates. Jessica Krueger has accepted the upper grade teaching call to Faith of Markesan.

**CLC Youth Camp** – This year's summer camp in Pillager, MN is scheduled for June 13-19, 2021. Because of spacing restrictions in Minnesota, attendance is currently limited to those entering 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the Fall of 2021. Should restrictions be lifted, those entering 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade will also be included. Initial registration date for Grades 9-12 will be on Palm Sunday, March 28, at 3:00 p.m. Central. Because of COVID uncertainties, no registration fee will be due at that time. Cost to be paid at a later date will be \$180 per camper. The initial registration date and time are so specific because space is limited, so don't delay.

**Dorm Supervisors** – Immanuel Lutheran High School in Eau Claire is currently accepting applications for supervisors for both the men's and women's dormitories. If you would like to apply, please see Pastor Roehl.