

Please bow your head with me

Lord may the words we speak and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen

Three boys are in the schoolyard bragging about their fathers. The first boy says, "My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a poem, they give him \$50."

The second boy says, "That's nothing. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a song, and they give him \$100."

The third boy says, "I got you both beat. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a sermon... and it takes four people to collect all the money!"

It's an Honor to be able to speak with you this morning. It always seems like such a great idea until the time I actually have to sit down and figure out what to say. I find it gratifying that in talking with pastors, they tell me that the optimum time to actually write your sermon is Saturday night, about midnight. I was able to beat that by a little but not much.

I've read that People will accept your ideas more readily, if you tell them that Benjamin Franklin said it first. Well he didn't say these things but Mathew Henry, Roger Hahn and some other scholars that I have liberally borrowed information from in preparing today's sermon, tell us that Corinth was quite a hot bed of wealth and commerce.

Corinth was a principal city of Greece, situated between the Ionian and Ægean Seas, capital of the province Achaia and the seat of the Roman proconsul. It was situated on the isthmus (or neck of land) that joined Peloponnesus to the rest of Greece, on the southern side, and had two ports adjoining, one at the bottom of the Corinthian Gulf, not far from the city, whence they traded to Italy and the west, the other at a more remote distance, whence they traded to Asia. From this situation, it is no wonder that Corinth should be a place of great trade and wealth; and, as affluence is apt to produce luxury of all kinds, neither is it to be wondered at if a place so famous for wealth and arts should be infamous for debauchery hence arose dangers to the purity of the Christian Church at Corinth.

Yet in this city Paul, by the blessing of God on his labors, planted and raise a Christian church on his first visit, chiefly among the Gentiles but also among many Jewish converts notwithstanding the vehement opposition of the countrymen of the latter. The converts were chiefly of the humbler classes

However Crispus, Erastus, and Gaius (Caius) were men of rank. Crispus was the chief ruler of the synagogue, who believed on the Lord, with all his house, He continued in this city nearly two years, and labored with great success, being encouraged by a divine vision assuring him God had much people in that city.

The city abounded with Greek philosophers who despised the plain doctrine of the gospel, because it did not feed the curiosity of an inquisitive and disputing temper. The pride of their learning had also carried many of them so far as to disbelieve or dispute against the doctrine of the resurrection. It is not improbable that they treated this question problematically, as they did many questions in philosophy, and tried their skill by arguing it pro and con. These men used Apollo's eloquent style of oratory with artful speeches and a flow of fine words. This was in stark contrast to Paul's simple preaching of Christ crucified.

To which I'm reminded of the wise saying that Logic is a systematic method of coming to the wrong conclusion but with confidence.

Emissaries from the Judaizers of Palestine boasted of "letters of commendation" from Jerusalem, the metropolis of the faith. They attacked the apostolic authority of Paul, some of them declaring themselves followers of Cephas, the chief apostle, others boasting that they belonged to Christ Himself, while they haughtily repudiated all subordinate teaching. Those persons gave out themselves for apostles. The ground taken by them was that Paul was not one of the Twelve, and not an eyewitness of the Gospel facts, and durst not prove his apostleship by claiming sustenance from the Christian Church.

Another section avowed themselves followers of Paul himself, but did so in a party spirit, exalting the minister rather than Christ. The followers of Apollo, again, unduly prized his Alexandrian learning and eloquence, to the disparagement of Paul, who studiously avoided any deviation from Christian simplicity. This group denied the future resurrection, and adopted the Epicurean motto, prevalent in heathen Corinth, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die".

So it is upon this backdrop upon which Paul writes to the Corinthians to talk about some of the issues they are dealing with. The scripture section for today addresses the contrast between human wisdom and the God's wisdom.

Verse 18 begins by contrasting foolishness with power. Preaching the cross of Christ is foolishness to those who are perishing. But it is the power of God to those who are being saved.

In passing Paul has revealed two important aspects of early Christian thought. First, being saved or being lost was not defined in terms of acceptance of some doctrine or in terms of a moral life. Rather, for New Testament Christians one's salvation was determined by one's response to the message of the cross. Basically "What are you going to do?" Rejection of the cross - both Christ's death on the cross and the idea of taking one's cross - meant rejection of salvation itself. On the other hand, embracing the cross with all its implications was the essence of saving faith.

Second, response to the cross and thus salvation was not simply a one-time event. Verse 18 describes both perishing and being saved with present tense, continuous action verbs. Daily accepting the cross meant a daily process of being saved and daily experience of the power of God. Or "what are you going to do today?"

Verse 20 introduces the other half of Paul's point that the message of the cross is foolishness. God is not bound by human definitions of wisdom and foolishness and often reverses our understanding of wisdom. Verses 22 and 23 present the heart of Paul's point in this paragraph. Jews demand signs that point to the mighty acts of God that characterized the deliverance he provided in the Exodus from Egypt. Greeks seek intellectual sophistication with philosophical discourses on justice, authority, and power. The preaching of the cross dismays both. To the

Jews the cross seems like the defeat of God rather than his triumph. To the Greeks the cross tells of the noble but futile death of one man and ignores the great themes of justice, citizenship, and persuasion. Thus the cross is a stumbling block and foolishness, nonsense to the logic of either Jewish or Greek cultures.

Only those who have answered the call of God, see the wisdom in the cross. They see the cross as both wisdom and power. It is wisdom that sees God at his most foolish moment being wiser than humans in our wisest moment. It is power that recognizes God at his weakest moment being stronger than humans in our most powerful moment. It is the paradoxical wisdom that understands the cross, symbol of defeat and shame, as the vehicle of God's ultimate triumph.

SO after going through this section what have we learned? What bits of wisdom or knowledge have we gleaned. I believe the lesson of the scriptures for today lies in our choices. As followers of Christ we have been called to make the decision of

What are we going to do and will we choose to do this every day.

We are living in perhaps the most advanced times ever and yet we have failed to address some of the most basic of needs for our fellow citizens. Issues of hunger, medical care and social divisions need to be addressed and must be part of our Christian calling. I believe this is the true calling of Christ. Remember when he was asked which is the most important commandment? Jesus answered Love thy God with all your heart and all your soul and your entire mind and with all your strength. This is the first commandment and the second is to love thy neighbor as thyself.

SO the question today is will you choose to love your god and your neighbor as your self and will you continue to choose that every day as you work to make our world a better place. It maybe that as followers of Christ we may be viewed as foolish but the wisdom and power of God can lift us up as we go about the business of making his kingdom on earth. We don't have to wait we can begin the process here and now.

By Allen Slater
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Wisdom tell us that you may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try.

Paul points out that his preaching the message of the cross at Corinth flew in the face of typical understanding of what makes for success. His preaching was not delivered with persuasive words of human wisdom. The skills of rhetoric and speech-making - so highly valued by the Greek culture of that time - did not contribute to the success of the gospel in Corinth. The success of the gospel at Corinth was not the product of human skill. It was a demonstration of the Spirit and of the power of God. Will you allow the spirit and power of God to work through you? Today and every day is the time to make your choice.

Amen