

The Cross: Holy Foolishness
I Corinthians 1:18-25
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Have you ever done anything that has made you look foolish?

We all have our foolish moments usually based on foolish decisions we make. I came across this story of a Bowling Green, Ohio student named Robert Ricketts who got his head bloodied when he was struck by a train. He told police he was trying to see how close to the moving train he could place his head without getting hit.

Foolishness well describes the Seattle thief who attempted to siphon gasoline from a motor home parked on a Seattle street. When police arrived at the scene they found the ill thief curled up next to the motor home. A police spokesman said that the man admitted to trying to steal gasoline, but said that he plugged his hose into the motor home's sewage tank by mistake and while attempting to siphon gas got a mouth full of sewage that made him sick.

(Would any of you like to share with the rest of us something foolish you did?)

When we do foolish things, the foolishness is more embarrassment than anything else. The Bible gives a definition of a fool that has more of a more spiritual aspect to it: "Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God" (Psalm 53:1). We can understand that statement, but it becomes more difficult to understand when in our passage today it speaks about the foolishness of God. God can be foolish?

Well, maybe not God, but the cross is foolish. At least the Jews thought so. They wanted a victorious Messiah, not one that died on the cross. Our passage says the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews (verse 23) because the cross was shameful. Crucifixion was appropriate for slaves and criminals, not the Messiah. Roman society was built around power and status. A crucified man was the epitome of weakness.

To the Greeks mentioned in our passage, it was just plain foolish. To the Greeks, a god could not suffer. A god must be immortal, which meant God could not die. So according to Greek wisdom, a God who suffered and died was an impossibility...a crucified Christ was just absolute nonsense.

Why then would God use a cross to bring people to himself if it caused so many people to stay away from God? Throughout the OT, God was continually calling people to himself, coming up with ways to bridge the gap between sinful people and a holy God.

Why did God choose this way – a cross – a stumbling block? Why would God close the gap between himself and humanity by allowing Jesus Christ to die on the cross? Our way of closing the gap between us and God is by our own efforts and works. According to the world, the cross makes no sense. It's foolish. But then, that's the point. It's God plan, not ours.

Have you noticed that a lot of things in God's world seem weak and foolish? Because in God's world, everything gets tossed upside down:

Find your life and you will lose it; lose your life and you will find it (Mt 10:38).

Exalt yourself and you will be humbled; humble yourself and you will be exalted (Lk 18:14)

Many who are first will be last and the last will be first (Mk 10:31)

If you want to be great, you must be servant (Mt 20:26).

Give what you have, and you will be given more.

These are paradoxes.

Apply these paradoxes to the cross, and suddenly there is a God who brings life out of death.

A Savior who brings salvation out of crucifixion.

In His forgiveness, we have freedom.

By His sacrifice we are saved...not by anything we can do, but simply by His grace.

God took an instrument of shame and death, and turned it into a sign of victory and hope.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said this:

"There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, and others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto individual and social salvation...More than ever before I am convinced of the reality of a personal God."

The problem with the cross is that it looks like failure. But what it does is that it transforms and brings new life. It is the power of God in our lives.

There is a story about a little girl who proudly wore a shiny cross on a chain around her neck. One day she was approached by a man who said to her, "Little girl, don't you know that the cross Jesus died on wasn't beautiful like the one you're wearing? It was an ugly, wooden thing." To which the girl replied, "Yes, I know. But they told me in Sunday School that whatever Jesus touches, He changes."
Even a cross.

Let us say verse 18 together: For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."