

The Folly of the Cross

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Introduction

Verse 18 may seem familiar to you. *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.* This was the closing verse of last week's Epistle reading. This verse connects these two readings with the word *for*. This is a word that assigns reason. It's like saying, *because*. Last week, Paul said that God had not sent him to baptize, but to *preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power (Romans 1:17)*. This is because *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 (v. 18)*. The Word of the cross is contrary to the wisdom of the world. But what is the word of the cross?

The Word of the Cross

The *Word of the cross* is the Gospel, the Good News that Jesus Christ, the Son of God became a man and died for our sin. From the world's point of view, this doesn't make sense. A person of the world thinks, *If I were God, with all that entails, being that powerful and could do anything I wanted, would I become a human being and go through this life? Would I suffer and die for people? Most people aren't worth dying for. What God in their right mind would go through all that for humans?* This shouldn't surprise us. In all his parables of the kingdom of God, Jesus makes His kingdom seem upside-down to the way the world operates.

The Upside-Down Kingdom

In **Luke 15**, Jesus tells the story of a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep in the open country to look for one lost lamb. No shepherd in his right mind would take that risk. He goes on to tell about a man who gives his youngest son his portion of the inheritance while still alive. That's unheard of. It's saying the father is dead to the son. Then, after this son who has forsaken him, is in need, he welcomes him back with open arms and reinstates him as his son. This is upside-down to the world because the fallen world is upside-down in sin. The world is upside-down to the way it's supposed to be, the way God created it.

What Does This Mean?

What does this mean? What does it mean for humanity? What does it mean for our witness?

Fallen Humanity = Fallen Reason

All life has been affected by the fall. This includes our reason and logic. We fallen humans can only make sense of this world as far as our senses can take us. Even then, we can be fooled. That's why we have the scientific method of observation, theorizing, testing, and proving. Anything that can't be quantified or measured is beyond our understanding by reason. And it is speculation, guesswork, and imagination. So, when *scientists* talk about the origins of the universe or the beginning of life, they're making guesses based on their interpretation of the data. But their interpretation is based on their

presupposition of what they think happened. In other words, what our school systems teach as facts are speculations based on imagination.

Light into Darkness

Martin Luther said: *The whole world with all diligence has struggled to figure out what God is, what He has in mind and does. Yet the world has never been able to grasp the knowledge and understanding of any of these things. But here we have everything in richest measure (LC Apostles' Creed Art. III 63).* He is referring to **Holy Scriptures** as confessed in the **Apostles' Creed**. Since there are so many things we can't understand, God gave us a revelation so we can know what He wants us to know. In His Word, He reveals Himself as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. He has shined His light into our darkness and given us all the answers we need.

Always Opposition

Because people are mired in their sin, they will keep on *acting like mad men*, as Chrysostom says, and *reject the medicines which bring salvation*. One of our granddaughters came home from school crying the other week. It seems a friend on the bus had seen her Bible and made the statement that her parents had taught her that the Bible was nothing but a bunch of hooey. Carol gave our granddaughter **verse 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* and told her to share it with her friend and tell her that she will pray for her.

It's Not Our "Eloquent Words"

That may seem rather simple, but that is what we must do. Because of humanity's fallen reason, our *eloquent words (1 Corinthians 1:17)* will not change people's minds. All we can do is follow the example of the Apostle Paul (Read **1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:1-2**). Our job is not to convince people to believe in Jesus or prove that the Bible is God's Word. Our job is to proclaim Christ crucified, risen, and coming again. Even though the world thinks it's folly.

The Spirit Moves

Later, in **chapter 3**, Paul will bring up the subject of he and Apollos again, and say, *I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6)*. It is the Spirit who works faith in us. He works through the Word.

Faith and Salvation through Word and Sacrament

That's why we keep proclaiming the Word. It is the Word of the cross that saves because the Holy Spirit works through that Word to work faith in the hearts of people. And He continues to work through the Word to strengthen our faith. When the Word is applied to water, it becomes the water of Baptism where the Holy Spirit works faith in a person's life to save them. When it is added to the bread and wine, they become Holy Communion and we receive the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine. God once again forgives our sin and works faith in us. Because, while the world thinks it's folly, the Word of the cross is really the power of salvation.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,*

Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
