

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are here tonight because we preach and believe in a crucified Christ. That's what Lent is all about, taking extra time out of our week to study and meditate on the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus.

By God's grace most of us, if not all of us, here tonight have no problem believing in a crucified Christ. We can't remember a time when we didn't believe. We can't understand by personal experience how foolish believing in Christ crucified seems to so many people around us. In fact, when Paul says that the message of the cross is foolishness to people the word he uses is the word from which we get our English word "moron". People in Paul's day, and many people still today, think that anyone who believes that a crucified Christ can save them is a moron—that they either have no brains or they surely aren't using them.

As we take our Lenten journey again this year we meet quite a few people who were convinced that the message of the cross was foolishness.

Take for example, Pontius Pilate. He was at least trying to be a "wise man," a savvy politician who could handle the Jews and keep them from rioting. To him, it seemed wise, expedient, to send a man he had declared innocent of all charges to be crucified. No wonder he responded to Jesus' claim that he had the truth with the infamous question, "What is truth?" He thought it was wise to ignore his wife's dire warning, urging him to have nothing to do with the innocent Jesus. And what did his wisdom get him? He was eventually removed from his governorship and tradition claims he ended up taking his own life.

Or take for example the Scribes and Jewish leaders, the great religious scholars of the day. They were so convinced that the Christ would be an earthly ruler who would rescue them from the Romans that they rejected Jesus because he didn't fit what they wanted. They saw the great power he had demonstrated as he healed the blind, the deaf, the lame and the lepers; as he cast out demons and fed thousands and even raised the dead. But, like King Herod, they wanted Jesus to perform miracles on demand, to carry out their agenda, and when he refused, they called for him to be crucified. They reasoned that it would be better for Jesus to die than for the Romans to remove them from their positions of power. What did their scholarship get them? Just what they were hoping to avoid. About 35 years later the Romans did remove them from power and destroy the city.

Or take the men of Athens who loved to dabble in philosophy. Paul had their attention for a while, when he complimented them on being religious, for they had an altar to a different god on every corner. But when he told them that the one true God punished his one and only son in their place, allowing him to be crucified, and then he raised him from the dead, they scoffed at him. How foolish, they thought.

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Where has their wisdom, scholarship and philosophy gotten them? Have any of them died and risen from the dead? Have any of them been able to instill confidence, a sure and certain hope of eternal life that gives people peace and comfort in life and in death? No! They have only succeeded in being a tool of Satan to create more doubt and uncertainty.

And yet, the wise man, the scholar and the philosopher of this age is here tonight, living inside of each of us.

How many times haven't you thought that you knew better than God? You knew God said something was forbidden but you did it anyway, or maybe you didn't do it, but you sure thought

about it and wonder why God would make such a foolish rule. How many times haven't you chosen expediency over truth, as Pilate did?

How many times haven't you listened to philosophers of this age talking about evolution, or about how you have to take charge of your own life and make yourself number one because if you don't help yourself no one else will, or talking about reincarnation/past life regression and been tempted to think that maybe there was something to what they were saying?

How often haven't you thought about the teaching of the Trinity, three distinct persons and yet only one divine being; or the incarnation, God who is infinite and can be everywhere at once, becoming man, a finite being who can be only one place at a time; or Christ crucified, God who can't die, dying on the cross; a sacrifice offered 2000 years ago that covers our sins still today-- How often haven't you thought about these things and others and wondered, "How can this be?" How often haven't you been tempted to doubt? How often haven't you thought, "If only God would perform some miracle for me, or do just this one seemingly impossible thing for me, how much easier it would be to believe!"

Yes, the wise man, the scholar, the philosopher of this age, the Jew that demands a sign, the Greek that seeks after wisdom, all these people live inside of us; they are part of our sinful nature.

But behold the power of the message of the cross! As we hear that Jesus' death on the cross was the once-for-all-time sacrifice for sin that enables us to have peace with God and freedom to approach God without fear, our doubts and fears are overpowered. As we hear that Jesus didn't remain in the grave but that he rose again on the third day just as he said he would, we realize that Jesus' death and resurrection are the ultimate sign from God. The message of the cross has the power of God attached to it because the Holy Spirit works through it to enable us to believe and then to rejoice in the freedom and confidence that is ours in Christ.

By nature, we tend to go along with the wise men, scholars and philosophers of this world and think that an infinitely wise God should make the way of salvation a challenge for their intelligence; that it should be something that it takes a lot of years of study to grasp, like learning another language. But imagine if God would have done it that way. Imagine if he would have made the way of salvation something that only the wisest and most scholarly could figure out. Then how many would be saved? Then how could a little child be saved?

Behold the wisdom of God. He destroys the wisdom of the wise and frustrates the intelligence of the intelligent. He has made the way of salvation simple. "Jesus was crucified for you." It's a concept even little children can grasp. It's the wisdom and power of God in action.

As we spend extra time over the next six weeks focusing our attention on the suffering and crucifixion of a Jew named Jesus, the world around us thinks we are foolishly wasting our time. Our sinful nature will try to tell us that we have so many other, more important things to do, like watching the Olympics or doing homework or taking a nap. Our sinful nature will try to convince us that it's boring, we've heard it all before, there's nothing new. But, by God's grace, may we never forget that the **foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength**. For us, by God's grace, **Christ, a crucified and risen Christ, is the wisdom and the power of God**. He is the only way, the truth and the life. It is only because he willingly suffered and died on the cross in our place that we have forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift of God.