



March 7, 2021 Third Sunday in Lent: God's Foolishness

Greeting and announcements

Prelude: **God Leads Us Along.....G.A. Young, arr. James M. Stevens**

Sharing our Joys and Concerns Pastoral Prayer

God of wisdom, we are yearning to hear Your love for us in this time of worship. Open our hearts and our ears to perceive Your presence with us that calls out to us in love. Send Your Holy Spirit to inspire us to understand how You created this world and Your Kingdom, teaching us those things we find foolish may be Your way of teaching us Your grace and love for all who respond to You in praise.

During this time of worship, center our hearts, our souls, and our minds on Your Presence with us as we lift to you the prayers of our hearts. We know You promise to hear our prayers, always, and with confidence.

We come to pray for...

Our Church, for it's leaders and congregation

Our world and our country

Our loved ones - keep them: keep them in health, in safety, in comfort, in Your care Keep us, also and send forth Your Holy Spirit of truth, of comfort, and of power.

We pray for any among us who feel constrained, or emotionally distressed by our time and era and for any who need to know Your love for them in this hurting world.

We also lift to You those who need comfort as they mourn their loved ones. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, The comforter, who would remind us of Your promises that Nothing in life, or in Death, things present, nor things to come, nor angel or demons within our lives, nor anything in all of creation will ever be able to separate us from Your love in Jesus the Christ, our Lord.

The Lord's Prayer

Opening Hymn: **God of Grace and God of Glory #577, vs. 1,4**

**1. God of grace and God of glory, on thy people pour thy power; crown thine ancient church's story; bring her bud to glorious flower. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour, (of this hour) for the facing of this hour.**

**4. Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore; let the search for thy salvation be our glory evermore. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving thee whom we adore, (we adore) serving thee whom we adore.**

Call to Worship Adapted from Psalm 19 (Pastor Sue and Sharon Hutchinson)

Pastor: The heavens are telling us the Glory of God.

**People: The heavens don't speak, but we witness their testimony of God's handiwork and faithfulness to us.**

Pastor: God made the sun and moon, marking God's timing and cycles.

**People: God guides us through the day, weeks, months and years by God's wisdom shown in the heavens.**

Pastor: Praise God for all that God shows us;

**People: We praise God from whom all blessings come to us.**

Pastor: God gives us the earth, the sky, the plants and other creations to gladden our hearts on our journey;

**People: Praise be to God who is Faithful from everlasting to everlasting.**

## Musical Selection

### Unison Prayer:

**Creator God of the universe, You show us everyday Your wisdom as we see the cycles of the heavens and the earth, and yet we miss how Your kingdom tries to guide us into wisdom of living by Your ways and instruction. We try to figure out ways to live our lives, missing that Your foolishness of choosing to love us and others, without harming us or the others, and doing all the good You can, is the way You guide us to follow You within Your kingdom. We sometimes rely on our own wisdom, or are persuaded to live by the world's standards and practices. Often we desire signs, or proofs that Your ways will work in our lives. We desire safety, and success, and sometimes miss the message of the Cross in our journey. Show us how Jesus teaches Your victory over all things in this world, and our lives, by accepting his journey to the cross and trusting Your presence and power even in the face of death.**

New Testament Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

18 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. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 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? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. NRSV

Gospel Reading: John 2: 13-22

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also

poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. NRSV

Pastor: This is the word of God for the people of God.

### **People: Thanks be to God!**

Message: God's Foolishness

1 Corinthians became a favorite passage for me since going to Duke Divinity School—it actually brings a chuckle every time I read it or am reminded of it. It, truly is a serious message for all of us and not to be taken lightly, because it does point out God's foolishness (of Jesus' life, ministry, death and eventual resurrection) is far wiser than anything we can do, think, or say to give ourselves salvation. Never doubt that I downplay Jesus' importance in our journey of faith or God's amazing salvation plan for us.

The humor comes from my first experience of being a "Duke Student" and the subsequent years of remaining a "Duke Student." I went from "I'm honored" to have been selected to have the opportunity to study at Duke," to "Be afraid, be very Afraid!!! You are now a Duke Student." Several months before our first class, we were given a reading list that we would be tested on when we began our first class. One of the Theologians we had to read was Lesslie Newbigin and his book was "Foolishness of the Greeks." It was based on our 1 Corinthians passage. The title seemed innocent enough—I understood what the concept would be.

That's where my journey at Duke began. I couldn't understand much of what I was reading—it was beyond my comprehension ability. Every semester we would have to read a book by Lesslie Newbigin and Carl Barth—Duke professors loved those two theologian, we students, not so much. We all dreaded those two theology writers because we had to prove

that we could incorporate their thoughts and theology into comparisons to other theologians we had to read. My response throughout Seminary was to say at the end of every Comparative thesis was, “One thing all these theologian can agree on is that God exists, Jesus came to show us God, and the Holy Spirit is working in all our lives and the world.” I decided Theology was not going to be my PhD program.

My point, for this sermon, is the same point Paul is getting at in our 1 Corinthians passage—we, like the variety of theologians I had to compare while at Duke, all have different theologies, or what we expect God to do. The bottom line is we use our intellects and experiences to interpret God and what God should and does in our world and lives. We want proof, we want signs, we want safety and success, and yet God shows us Jesus.

Even the disciples didn’t understand God’s way of salvation through the death of Jesus. (Which, if you missed it brings us to our Gospel Lesson). Jesus kept predicting and announcing his death, and God’s way of destroying our human ways of “worshiping and praising God.” For the Jews, The Temple in Jerusalem was the center of worshiping God—The Temple was proof of God’s presence with them.” If it was destroyed, their “way of doing things was destroyed.” (and in our John passage, Jesus was destroying those “ways of doing things at the Temple and predicting it would be destroyed)

Likewise, for Jesus’ Disciples (who were Jewish), not only was the Temple in Jerusalem important to them, so was Jesus. For Jesus to predict the destruction of The Temple, and His own death, it was foolishness and a stumbling block to their understanding of God’s victory in their lives. Jesus, for them, was The Messiah, God’s anointed One, who rule victoriously and establish God’s reign in their lives. They would be successful, Triumphant by the power of God.

And yet, Jesus was faithfully following God’s plan. It wasn’t a plan of military triumph, defeating the “enemy.” The plan Jesus followed in his ministry, starting at his baptism, was to do all the good he could, by teaching about God’s love and grace, by healing any who had faith in God’s power—friend or enemy, and submitted to God’s ways “ . . . And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross.” Philippians 2:8.

This seems foolish to us and others that allowing ourselves to killed could be considered victory, or success. Remember the Zechariah 4: 6 passage:

Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of armies.

Jesus lived those words in His ministry, which baffled everyone in His time and era who wanted VICTORY. I’m going to remind you, again of my theology that we get our salvation through the resurrection of Jesus. Had Jesus become “The conquering Zealot Messiah” instead of the “The Messiah who God led and empowered Him to be,” We would never know that God has victory over ALL THINGS, INCLUDING WHAT WE CALL DEATH.

We, like the Greeks that Paul was talking about, believe in our own wisdom, and sometimes, we, like the Jews, want “signs” to prove a person’s message that they are speaking God’s Words to them. But God has done what was needed for our salvation. God empowered Jesus to be The Messiah we NEEDED, not The Messiah we WANT.

God’s ways may seem foolish to us, as we apply our wisdom to this world we live in, but Paul reminds us that God’s foolishness is wiser than any wisdom we may have, and God’s weakness of loving us beyond any comparison we have on this planet, is more powerful than we could ever imagine.

I’ll leave you with my mantra I leaned when comparing the different theologies I encountered while attending Duke: Here is the truth—God exists, Jesus came to show us God, and the Holy Spirit is working in all of our lives and the world, even to this day.

You have been reminded that Jesus Christ is your Lord and that you are God's servants- you are loved -you are forgiven -and you are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live as God's faithful ones in this world.

Closing Hymn: **In the Cross of Christ I Glory #295, vs. 1,4**

**1. In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time; all the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.**

**4. Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure, by the cross are sanctified; peace is there that knows no measure, joys that through all time abide.**

\*Benediction: (Pastor Sue and Kathy Demo)

Pastor: Remember, God is present with us throughout our journey of life.

**People: We praise God, knowing that God's foolishness is so much wiser than our wisdom.**

Pastor: Remember, Jesus came to show us God and God's loving presence with us.

**People: We will relish in the knowledge that God's love for us is more powerful than anything we can achieve for ourselves.**

Pastor: Have hope in the power of the Holy Spirit working within your live, and in the world around You;

**People: Praise to Almighty God who surrounds us with comfort, with hope and with empowerment to be God's faithful people.**

Pastor: God's weakness is stronger than human strength;

**People: God speaks to us through the prophet Zechariah: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of armies.'**

Pastor: Go into the future unafraid;

**People: For we are convinced: ". . .that Nothing in life, or in Death, things present, nor things to come, nor angels or demons within our lives, nor anything in all of creation will ever be able to separate us from God's eternal love in Jesus the Christ, our Lord."**

Postlude: **I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.. ..Indian Folk Melody, arr. Mark Hayes**