

Epiphany 4 / January 29, 2023

1 Corinthians 1:18

“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.”

What is the most foolish thing you have heard? Foolishness is often associated with unwise actions. There is a saying, “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” In the book of Proverbs, foolishness is contrasted with wisdom. Foolishness brings misery and ultimately leads to destruction. Wisdom brings blessing and leads to life. Knowledge of God and respect for His holiness, is the beginning of wisdom. In the Scriptures the Holy Spirit teaches that the way which seems most sensible to humans, is often the way that leads to ruin. What God considers wise, the world counts as foolishness and vice et versa. But as St. Paul says, “The foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

In the Second book of Samuel, King David fresh off victories over the Lord’s enemies and elated with his own pride, sought to bring the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant to Jerusalem. Without consulting the scriptures or the Lord’s priests, he got his buddies to hoist it onto an ox cart and on they went. The oxen stumbled, one of his friends touched the Ark to steady it. The holiness of the Lord immediately struck him dead. David was mystified, angry and afraid. What had he done wrong? What he did was act according to human wisdom, which is foolishness in the eyes of God. What he did was disrespect the Lord and His holiness, by handling the Most Holy Ark of the covenant in a casual and common manner.

The Ark of the Covenant was not just a box to be treated as cartage. It was the embodiment of the Lord’s holiness on earth and His presence among Israel. It was holy to the Lord. It was to not be touched by just anyone. It was to be moved only by the Levitical Priests with poles sanctified for that single purpose. It was to be transported in a manner that respected and honoured God’s holiness. When we consider the ways and thoughts of God, we must always look deeper than the surface. We must remember our thoughts are not God’s thoughts. God said to Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways.” The wisdom of the world is often foolishness in the eyes of God and vice et versa. This is nowhere more apparent than in the word of the cross, which is foolishness in the ears of those who reject it, but the power of God for forgiveness and life for those who believe it, in time and for eternity.

What is the word of the cross and why is it foolishness to those who reject it? The word of the cross is that God loves the world. The word of the cross is that in love, God gave His eternally begotten Son to share our humanity, suffer and die for our sins. The word of the cross is that whoever believes in Him has forgiveness in time and life in eternity. The word of the cross is the power by which God gives the peace of a good conscience in the guilt of sin. The word of the cross is the power by which God gives strength in the trials of life and gives hope the face of death. Paul writes, “The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” The word of the cross is God’s power in life, to life everlasting.

The word of the cross is foolishness to the world that rejects, because it shows us our sin, our bondage to sin and our hopeless condition because of sin. Sin must be horrible and beyond our control and cure, if God could only take away its guilt and heal us of its by sending His Son to share our humanity and die on the cross. The word of the cross is foolishness to the world that is perishing, because we humans don’t like to think we are that bad. The word of the cross is foolishness to those who reject it, because the cross convicts the world of sin. But to those who hear its message, see their sin and acknowledge their helplessness, the cross is the power of God for forgiveness, healing and life.

The power of the cross is the blood of Jesus. On the cross Jesus bled and died for our forgiveness. The cross shows the Saviour to those who see their sins and confess their need for God’s mercy. Jesus took away the sin of the world through the blood of His cross. In His blood there is the peace of a good conscience in relation to God, the peace of healing in relationship with God, the peace of knowing God doesn’t see us through our sins, but sees us through Christ’s righteousness that covers our offenses. The word of the cross is the promise of sharing in Christ’s resurrection and feasting in God’s presence in eternal life when death is swallowed up in Christ’s victory. The word of the cross is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, not only because it says everyone sins and falls short of the glory of God, but also because it shows we are powerless to save ourselves. The word of the cross says we need God to save us. Even as Eve and Adam in the garden wanted to be gods unto themselves, we humans want to be our own gods and saviours. In the past humans tried to make themselves godlike through religion and sacrifice. In the modern world humans try to make ourselves gods through science and technology. Science is simply seeing and studying the physical universe God made. Technology is the means by which we try to make the physical universe do our bidding, often unfortunately without any reference to, or acknowledgement of God.

Belief in God is considered foolish in the world of scientific academia. To publicly express belief in God as Creator crosses the line into stupidity. A certain career destroyer. If simple belief in a Creator is considered absurd by the most highly educated people in the world, how much more ridiculous is belief in Christ the Saviour, who redeemed the world from sin and death through the blood of the cross? How ridiculous is it in the eyes of the world, ancient and modern? The Greek word translated in our text as 'folly' is the equivalent of the English word 'moronic.' Moronic is foolishness to the power of ten. The word of the cross may be considered foolish by those who are perishing, but as St. Paul says, to those who believe, it is God's power for our salvation in time and eternity.

God's wisdom is often considered foolish according to the wisdom of the world. But as St. Paul says, even God's apparent foolishness surpasses the world's wisdom. What is worthless and despised in sight of humans is precious and honoured in the eyes of God. Paul reminds the Corinthians that not many of them came from the intellectual elite of society. But God valued them and called them. Nothing was more despised in the ancient world than the cross. It was a symbol of sin, condemnation and brutal death. But despite its shame, in the cross of Jesus, God showed Himself our loving Saviour and expressed Himself in a manner that is understandable to people of every age, whether technologically primitive or technologically advanced.

Our understand of nature has changed since St. Paul wrote our text, but human nature remains the same. We all sin. We all die. Death comes because of sin. Blood is the force by which life is sustained. Sin poisons our blood so that in time and through circumstance, it loses its power to sustain life and so we all die. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to heal us from the poison of sin. Jesus' blood is the word of the cross! Jesus' blood is the antidote to sin and cure for death. In His blood we have forgiveness in time and life in eternity. This may sound extremely foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who believe, it is the power of God for salvation in time and life in eternity. God bless us always with ears to hear, hearts to receive and faith to believe the word of the cross. In Jesus' Name. Amen.