

Scripture:

Psalm 32

1st Corinthians 1:18-31

“The message of the cross.”

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing --- but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” --- so Paul says in the opening line of our passage today from 1st Corinthians.

And in a way Paul’s words are just as relevant today as they were when he first shared them almost 2,000 years ago.

The cross is still either foolishness ---- or it is the saving power of God.

To the Jews and the Greeks of the first century ----- the cross was utter foolishness.

And so it’s remarkable that Paul chooses the cross to assert the power of God.

From a non-Christian perspective it is utter foolishness --- borderline insanity ----- to claim the cross --- the brutal slaughter of God Himself in a public disgraceful display ---- as having anything to do with God’s power.

Jews sought after signs.

And Greeks wisdom --- knowledge.

As verses 22 and 23 from 1st Corinthians say --- “Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling bock to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.” ----- “Gentiles” meaning all non-Jews including Greeks.

Jews sought after --- demanded signs ---- and hanging up on tree --- a cross - -- beaten ---- spit on despised --- disgraced --- was not only NOT a sign of the power of God ---- it was more like the very assurance of the absence of God.

Deuteronomy chapter 21 verse 23 includes --- “Anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse.”

“Anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse.”

It was foolishness to think of Jesus --- in Jewish eyes anyway --- as the Messiah.

It was foolish --- impossible --- in Jewish eyes --- to look upon the cross as having anything to do with God’s will or God’s power.

“Anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse.”

And it was no different for Gentiles ---- non-Jews --- Greeks.

God ---- from a Greek perspective --- would never ever stepped down into the messiness and dirt of lowly human affairs.

The very idea of the incarnation --- God becoming human was utterly revolting to the Greek mind.

And so the idea of God not only becoming human but dying in a hideous --- indeed the most hideous and grotesque of ways ---- was utter non-sense --- something not at all possible.

And it’s important to remember that it’s not just that Jesus was killed --- it was also how He was killed.

The Roman practice of crucifixion on a cross was the most brutal --- humiliating ---- and grotesque kind of death.

The crucifixion was humiliating and vile ---- it was all about total annihilation and total humiliation ---- one was crucified naked ---- and public nudity was completely indecency for a Jew --- abhorrent.

And there would have been blood ---- sweat --- defecation --- urine ---- all splattered about at a crucifixion --- it was the most brutal and disgraceful kind of killing --- public ---- memorable --- and messy.

And interesting enough ---- there are no human records of anyone crucified before Jesus Christ.

Again --- there are no human records --- no names of anyone crucified before Jesus Christ.

Crucifixion was meant to wipe you off the face of the earth and leave no record of you ever having lived.

Roman citizens were hung --- a quick --- and relatively painless --- fully clothed --- done somewhat decently --- if you can ever use that term when it comes to killing.

Crucifixion was for the lowest of the low --- wipe them off the face of the earth --- leave no record of them.

It's not just that Jesus was killed --- it is also how He was killed.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ---- but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” ---- were extremely challenging words.

The cross was utter foolishness to Jews and Greeks --- to anyone but a Christian – and even then it was a bit of a challenge to work through.

And there weren't a whole lot of Christians just yet --- the early church was just beginning to take shape thanks to people like Paul and his little band of followers.

Remember the early Christians had no New Testament ----- they were turning to the Old Testament ---- scouring it to find meaning in Christ.

And here Paul ----- holds up the cross as the pre-eminent example of the power of God.

He would have been laughed out of most of the places he went to preach and teach.

But he's telling this first little band of believers to preach Christ crucified --- to preach the cross.

“But we preach Christ crucified” --- he says in verse 23 today --- not Christ resurrected ---- but Christ crucified.

That God would suffer ----- and step down into the brutality --- and shame --
- and indecency --- and vileness of Roman crucification --- the brutality ---
the ugliness ---- the vileness of sin ---- speaks to the very power of His love
for us like nothing else.

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup --- you proclaim the
Lord’s death until he comes.” ---- Paul later says in 1st Corinthians 11 verse
26.

We proclaim Jesus’ death ---- the cross ----- every time we eat and drink
sacramentally in His name.

The crucifixion ---- the cross ---- in all of its gross brutality ----- shows the
depth of Gods’ love for us ---- like nothing else.

God could have chosen to accomplish --- and assure salvation some other
way --- a far less painful and grotesque way --- but He doesn’t.

God knows sin is real and painful and hurtful ----- and indecent ---- and
harsh and vile ---- and ugly.

And so He sinks into the very depth of it ----- consuming it --- and
transforming it’s very nature forever.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ---
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

The signs and knowledge --- and whatever else people may want in order to
be convinced --- or shown ----- that God is all powerful --- is not how God
works.

God could have chosen majestic --- miraculous acts of power and might ---
like the Jews wanted.

And God could have chosen Mensa like intellectual acumen ---- genius -----
intellectual acrobatics ---- logic and reason like the Greeks wanted.

But He didn't ----- instead He chose the cross.

He took what was hideous --- and embarrassing --- and indecent ----- and turned it into the supreme example of His power to change things and make them new and different ---- subjecting them to His will.

God took the most feared ----- the most powerful tool at the hands of the Romans --- and stripped it of all its power and influence.

He sunk as low down into human darkness and destruction --- the wipe you off the face of the earth event --- showing his power --- not by sidestepping it --- but by enduring it --- and consuming it in His infinite love.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing --- but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

“The weakness of God” --- Paul says in our reading today ---- verse 25 ----
“The weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

“The weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

The Romans ---- threw at Christ --- in violent anger ---- the epitome of its strength ---- their --- "We'll wipe you off the face of the earth event."

And God took it and turned it around into something life giving and saving.

That's the power of the cross.

And to be clear ---- the resurrection does not do away with the cross.

The resurrection is the vindication of the crucified one ---- not the doing away with the crucifixion.

The power is in the cross ---- the confirmation --- the vindication --- the ---
“Oh yes it's all true” moment ----- comes at the resurrection --- but the decisive event is the cross.

The power and triumph is in the cross.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing --- but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

The early Christians had no New Testament.

They turned to the Old Testament to try to understand the meaning of this strange and brutal death of their Lord.

Imagine how they must have poured over and scoured --- every little word and syllable in the Hebrew Bible --- hoping to understand how this death of the very Son of God had always been part of God’s will from the very beginning.

And as they are scouring and searching and desperately seeking understanding --- Paul refers them to the cross --- a new sign --- a new wisdom --- a new understanding --- a new act and revelation of God that seemed almost senseless.

Jesus wasn’t just another wise old Rabbi or teacher.

He was --- and is ---- God Himself.

Things are not as they appear at the cross.

The cross went from being a dark practice --- that put fear into every citizen in the land --- to a moment of triumph.

The cross is satan and God eye to eye.

The cross is ----- humanity over here --- satan here --- and just as satan is about to unleash his whole arsenal --- Christ steps in and intercedes --- saving us --- taking it all upon Himself.

And we are left unscathed.

That’s the power of the cross.

The resurrection is the vindication ---- the confirmation of what happened at the cross --- satan defeated --- but the cross is the very heart ---- the cross is where the battle was fought and won.

The cross is cosmic ---- and its implications cannot be overstated.

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup --- you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

We proclaim the cross by sharing in this sacrament.

It all happened at the cross --- we celebrate it at the resurrection ---- but it all happened at the cross --- and Paul was one of the earliest --- if not the earliest people to understand this.

He’s the first theologian of the cross if you like.

No matter how foolish it made him look --- no matter how idiotic it may have appeared to all those around him --- Jews and gentiles ----- Paul knew it was all about what happened at the cross --- submission turned into transformation ----- weakness to strength ---- last to first ---- the power of God to change any and everything.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing --- but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

The message of the cross is things are not as they appear --- things don’t end as they appear they might end ----- God changes things as God sees fit.

It can sometimes be hard to apply the divine truths of the gospel to the messiness --- and pain --- and frustrations and sadness of everyday life.

Everyday life can be messy and dirty and frustrating and ugly --- it can be hard to see how God is working in our world sometimes.

What happened to God on the cross is sometimes how we feel about how God is still being treated today --- poorly --- disrespectfully --- pushed around by greater forces.

And yet no matter what the world throws at us --- no matter what form evil takes ----- God meets evil face to face just as He did at the cross ---- and He rectifies things --- He changes things --- taking what looks brutal --- making it beautiful in a lasting and final and measureless way.

God rectifies --- and reconciles --- and redeems --- and saves us ---- not through the snap of the fingers ----- but through the tough ---- and down and dirty --- nitty gritty ---- Christ on the cross.

Jesus says to satan on the cross ----- “Give it your all --- give me all you’ve got --- don’t hold back --- lay it on me.”

And satan does ---- and it’s not enough.

In a sense ----- God bends ----- but He doesn’t break --- better put God redefines what break and bend mean.

It’s not until the full power of the crucifixion has been unleashed on Christ that God responds and acts.

God doesn’t cut it short --- He takes all there is to take ---- consuming it all -- taking it all in --- only to transform it --- and render it weak and powerless.

The cross reminds us ---- human strength is not the be all end all.

“The weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

The cross reminds us human ingenuity is not the be all end all either.

The message of the cross is that God is the be all end all.

Christ on the cross is the end of evil having any kind of lasting influence or power.

That’s why we celebrate --- as we do.

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup --- you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

Because of Christ on the cross ---- there is a new reality --- a new way --- a new hope --- and nothing ----- no human act --- or evil power can ever change this.

As we enter into the season of Lent --- that's what we're journey to.

The cross ----- were evil and God meet --- cross paths --- clash paths -----
----- decisively and finally.

Easter --- resurrection isn't Lent ----- it's Easter --- a new season ----
vindication of what already occurred 3 days earlier.

We know what we're journeying to --- the cross.

Don't think of Easter as the end --- because it isn't ---- it's a new beginning -
--- the cross is the end of Lent.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ---
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Lent ----- directing our attention to the power of God in the cross of Christ.

The message of the cross ---
--- God's power to overcome.

The message of the cross ----
--- the depth of God's love for us.

The message of the cross ---- --
---- God's power to change any and everything.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ---
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Amen.