

“Christ Crucified”

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” 1 Corinthians 1:25.

In college, I had the opportunity to take a class focused on Shakespeare’s plays. The design of the class was to experience some of Shakespeare’s plays by reading through some of them and discussing them. With most of my classes geared toward science and math, this class was much different than I was used to. In many ways, this change was refreshing, but it was also challenging.

One of the more challenging parts of the class was wrapping my mind around the actions and words of the fool in some of the plays. The character of the fool in some of these plays isn’t what our modern minds likely jump to first. These characters aren’t people who make bad choices and are prone to mistakes. Nope, the fool, as challenging and odd as the character may be to understand, is one of the wisest characters in the entire play. Towards the end of the class, I started to catch on to this truth that if I wanted to learn and hear the greatest insight that the play was proclaiming I needed to pay attention more to the words of the fool!

Now what added to my challenge was that in many ways, the character of the fool hid in plain sight. This character wasn’t the main focus in any of the plays. There were always other characters who were more prominent with more lines and details, yet the fool was always around, always connected to the main action. Typically, the status of the fool was much lower than the main characters, but despite the inferior status, the fool had much greater understanding than his superiors. Shakespeare plays are tricky, revealing the critical lessons in the least likely of ways and this took me awhile to learn and discover.

While I know that our lives aren’t plays, sometimes we can talk about our lives using a play as a metaphor. Our lives have prominent people, prominent characters, none more prominent than ourselves. The people in our lives, the characters in our life’s play have different stations in our eyes. Depending on the season we’re in, those stations of those characters fluctuate. And among all these people, among all these characters, is the character of the fool just like those Shakespeare plays I studied in college.

Perhaps we wouldn’t consider our life’s play to ever have this character of the fool. Maybe we wouldn’t believe there’s someone in our life who could even be cast for this role. Yet, what I would put before all of us, myself included, with this metaphor, is not only do our lives’ plays have the character of the fool, we all have the same person playing this character of the fool. Yes, the fool in each of our lives’ plays is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Again, hear me clearly on this point. Describing God with the role of fool in our life’s play isn’t to call God foolish and silly. No, as we considered earlier, this role is one of pointed wisdom and truth that is so often overlooked and missed by the surrounding characters. Experiences from our own lives bear this reality out. Caught up in our own circumstances, we view God as lower or inferior and ignore His Words and Works for our lives and situations.

We are the center of our lives. We so easily put ourselves at center stage. We are so concerned about our sinful voices being heard and our sinful actions being approved that we miss the eternal truth and wisdom God places right in front of us. God’s wisdom and truth are hidden in plain sight because we don’t have the heart and eyes to recognize and receive them.

The reality that I hope this metaphor of a play and the character of the fool brings to light for us is what our second reading from 1 Corinthians highlights. Paul’s words to the church in Corinth reveal this sobering truth with which we struggle, as Paul states it, **“the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”** (1 Corinthians 1:25). Too often we believe the opposite of what Paul shares, we consider what we bring to the table as of greater value than what God brings. And with this perspective, we dig in with our pride, stay stuck in sin’s slavery, remain on the hook for our debt with God and ultimately, eternally, find ourselves perishing.

We need God to change our perspective. We need God to open our eyes and create in us new hearts. We need God to powerfully reprioritize our lives and minds. We need God to thwart and destroy the wisdom that the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh crave and treasure above His wisdom. And God does this. He does this work in and through Jesus! Not Jesus, merely the moral model, but Jesus the Crucified. Jesus, God in the flesh, who lived, died and rose to make a present and eternal difference in your life and mine. Jesus the Crucified, He is the life altering power and wisdom of God for our lives.

I know that this message sounds the same as weeks before. Yada, yada, we're sinners. Yada, yada, we're saved because of Jesus. We're so easily tempted to and fooled into growing weary of this message. It can come across to us as a broken record that we've heard too many times before. As one fellow sinner to another, I get this, trust me I do. However, dear friends in Christ, we can't grow spoiled of the Gospel! We need it too much!

The merciful work our Lord and Savior has done through the things that are lowly and despised, through His suffering and death, is everything for us. Jesus is God's wisdom to us, He is our righteousness, He is our holiness and He is our redemption. He is the perspective-changing, eye-opening, heart-recreating, life-and-mind-reprioritizing power of God in our lives.

Best of all you can get yourself some of this 'Jesus-power' right here, right now. No, it's not magic. It's not earth-shattering experiences. It's not insight into all the mysteries of this world. It's a promise, the greatest promise, fulfilled and delivered in the humble, unexpected message of Christ Crucified. This is the message through which the Holy Spirit works! This is the message that reveals that everything we have and can offer from ourselves will never be enough for our salvation. And this is also the message that assures us that Christ willingly became everything we need for our salvation. Jesus lived, died, rose, ascended and is returning for us so that we might be with Him forever.

You see, God's promises pack the punch of His presence. His Words aren't empty and shallow. These Words aren't foolish and silly, rather they are God's personal bond with His people. He shares His Words with all of us in the most ordinary of ways so that we all might have access to them. From the greatest to the least, God's Words deliver what they promise regardless of a person's status! President, billionaire, athlete, stay-at-home-mom, incarcerated, shut-in, friend, enemy, God's Words are for each of us, so that we might know that we are forgiven, loved and treasured because of God's work not our own.

Yes, the Lord's humble and seemingly powerless message and means, the words of Scripture and the Sacraments, declare to us that He's doing the saving work, not us! In the Church, forgiveness is powerful, not because we speak certain words, but because Jesus backs up our words with His life, death and resurrection. Baptism is effective, not because we have the right strength of faith, but because God's promise is the right strength to connect us to Christ Crucified, Christ Risen! Communion is beneficial, not because we've made ourselves worthy by our actions and confirmation vows, but because Jesus' promise to be present in, with and under bread and wine makes it so.

In the same way that our Lord and Savior delivers His saving grace through humble Scripture and Sacrament, so also does our Lord and Savior build up His Church through meek and lowly people. Yes, people like you and me! No, we aren't perfect nor will we ever be this side of heaven. Neither are we superheroes of faith! And still our Lord and Savior has a purpose for each of us. As He leads and guides us into the everyday things of our everyday lives, He is at work in ways we can't even anticipate.

Dear Emmanuel family, I know that there's a lot of foolish and silly things in our current day and age. And I know that with so much, really too much, to take in and process it's hard for us to sort through what's valuable wisdom. Don't be fooled! God's Word and His gifts aren't part of that foolishness and silliness. What our Lord shares today and every day until He returns is precious and vital for our present and eternal life. Our need is great and thanks be to God, Christ Crucified is far greater than our need. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan