

**Brian's Sermon Text for Sunday Worshiping at Brentwood
Sunday, July 5, 2020**

Fools for Christ
(Psalm 45:10-17 and 1 Corinthians 3:1-23)



**Well, what is your choice?
Shall I take a rod when I come to you,
or love and a gentle spirit?
(1 Cor 4:21 – Bruce Paraphrase)**

Word to Ponder = Fool

Congregational Wisdom = being silly, doing things of no consequence, good at fooling ourselves, jester, clown, the fool in Shakespeare, ignoramus, not being serious, gullible, prone to error, well-meaning but misguided, doesn't listen

In chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, Paul continues to advocate for a unity among Christ's people that is grounded in the way the Jesus, the Creator Christ or Ambassador, was human among us, full of grace and truth.

What he's arguing against seems to be various individuals who have asserted their own authority by claiming to know what God requires or what God allows.

These claims are aligned to old patterns of ordering life together, patterns that seem to be sensible and acceptable in their social context, some religious, some political, some economic, and some cultural. We'll get into more of the details later in our exploration of these letters.

In contrast to these sensible and logical interpretations, Paul draws in this passage on the image of the fool. I've been enjoying conversations with Ted Siverns, among others, on the Corinthian correspondence.

Ted has been a friend since the 1970s.
He has taught New Testament in seminaries
in Canada, Lebanon, and Taiwan.
He has ministered with congregations
in Ontario and British Columbia.
He and Betty join us from time to time in these online services.
She has offered exceptional leadership
in women's organizations in the church.

In our conversation this week, Ted pointed out
the role of the fool in Middle Eastern culture.
At its core, the role of the fool
was to puncture the pretensions of power.
They were to speak truth to power
in ways that pointed out the ultimate folly
of many of the strategies being devised
to maintain that power and control.
They were the guardians, the ambassadors,
of the core values of the culture
that those in power were distorting or ignoring.

We didn't get into this dimension in our conversation,
but I found myself wondering if Jesus was the model fool
in this sense of calling people back to the core values
of God's way of living together.
I think that's what Paul was getting at
in the contrasts he drew in this passage.
We are foolish, but you are wise.
We are weak, but you are strong.
We are despised, but you are honoured.
But Paul does not want to accuse and shame his colleagues
(remember the way he describes them at the beginning of the letter –
as respected participants in God's work being sanctified),
but to advocate for Christ's way of exercising influence.

That's where the final contrast in this passage lands
and that's what I want to stress today.
Do we beat people into submission
with whatever the current equivalents are of a rod or stick?
Remember, Paul authorized and encouraged
just such an approach to Christians
prior to his dramatic encounter with Jesus outside Damascus.
Or do we love them into change with a gentle spirit,
treating them with the respect and affection God has for them,
no matter where they have wandered off and gotten lost?

We live in a culture that glorifies violence
In a bewildering range of forms.
Think of video games, movies, TV.
In addition to physical violence,
there is verbal and psychological violence
that lies at the root of systemic racism
and that is tolerated and encouraged
far too widely these days.

It seems foolish, confronted with this approach, to love with a gentle spirit.
What kind of wimp does that?

Well, one who trusts in and is loyal to
the Creator who lived with us for a season
to show us the mysteries of their foolish holiness
and who remains at work within and among us
through the power of their Holy Spirit.

This morning's passage confronts and challenges us
with the possibility of living into the divine foolishness
of justice, kindness, and humility.

May we have the ears to hear, the eyes to see, and the souls to do.

My Notes

My Prayers



Prayers of the People

[spoken or written into the service]

Bring your comfort to the afflicted.
Bring your challenge to the complacent.
Bring your healing to those who are battered.
Bring your resilience to those who love.

The wisdoms of this world seem so compelling.
It is so tempting to assert power and control.
We so enjoy our material possessions.
Surely, it is foolish to deny these.

Yet you and your apostles did just that.
In your teachings, you offered a deeper truth,
a truth that can shape the ways
we use our wisdom, power, and possessions
to participating in your creating of your commonwealth.

Many see this way of Christ
as foolishness.
Redeem us to see things differently.
Infuse us with the foolishness
of your forgiving and reconciling love
and show that to the world in everything we do.

And inspire us to hear afresh that foolishness
as we sing your prayer: