

Sermon Notes: March 7, 2021

Focus: Foolish Wisdom in 1st Corinthians

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This is the power of God... "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 1 Corinthians 1

Many moons ago, my church had a partnership with a Sudanese congregation. They had no board, no budget, no staff, but did have a vision. Over a bowl of *goraas de dama*, they shared their vision to be a faithful outpost for South Sudanese immigrants. They had no business running a church in the US, literally. They had no business plan and weren't even a registered non-profit.

Their head pastor was an uber driver who had recently fled South Sudan. South Sudan is one of our newest countries in the world. In 2011, Sudan split in two because an uncivil, religious war. His flock's struggle was huge in the US. After fleeing for their lives, they made worship central to their existence. Everyone was barely scraping by financially, but their solid rock of faith was unshaken. Their church space bounced around from a Best Western, to a wedding reception hall, to one family's particularly big living room.

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Here I was -- our church had a budget, staff, and history. I had to learn and learn again that comfort and establishment comes at a cost. At the time, we were full of portfolio managers, geophysicists, CFOs, wellhead engineers, etc. - you get the idea. We worshipped "the family" but were repelled when new kids didn't behave, or their families did not give to the budget.

For Jews (Sudanese Evangelicals) demand signs and Greeks (Established Episcopalians) desire wisdom but (we) proclaim Christ crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. 1 Corinthians 1 -- mostly

"Weak and Foolish" is not a description I have ever seen on an Episcopal Church website. But I am willing to gamble that you, like me, desire wisdom (Greeks) over signs (Jews). I am less interested in people miraculously walking than people finding wisdom to live peacefully. You probably really value well-ordered worship services, perfectly groomed campuses, balanced budgets, and professionalism. I learn and learn again that professionalism creates its own problems. Pursuing organized wisdom can be a stumbling block to our collective health. We struggle to leave room for the mystery of God's power lived in the spaces between us by being too "good"! Don't think that I am trashing either signs or wisdom, but neither is the central point.

Professionalism in church might be the stumbling block of our current age. I am attracted to professionalism as much as anybody else. Let me tell you a story. I was very impressed by a parish in Oklahoma. One day, I asked them how they got to where they were. They said their priest was a good preacher, but not anything else. Because of him, they all had to come together, without ego, and build something beautiful. To my horror, they said this in front of a priest who was as entertained by the story as they were.

Examples of God's power that don't fit into professionalism:

- The most powerful Episcopal worship I ever had the privilege of being a part of was in Pharr, Texas with a computerized piano, one priest, and 20 people.

- The most engaging fellowship was at an Anglican Church in New Zealand with Kool-Aid and animal crackers -- according to one of our own.
- The biggest healing, I ever witnessed was next to a humming generator at an Episcopal homeless ministry.
- The most compelling stewardship talk was made by a twenty-year old nervously sharing poetry at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. I wrote a check for the first time in my life to a church not my own.

Let's pursue great fellowship, maybe with some of not-so-great food. Let's pursue glorious singing, even if one day all we have is a computer that plays organ. Let's seek healing, even when it blows our well-intentioned desire to control the wisdom of God.

Here is my Lenten work in progress:

- Fellowship that is terrific, even if the coffee is terrible.
- Worship that sings with life, even if off key.
- Liturgy that provokes the best in us instead of confirming the pickiest in us.
- Healing that empowers, instead of bandages.
- Poetry that inspires generosity.

We would do well to turn our heart to God's foolish weakness. God's foolishness is wiser than our investment portfolio. God weakness is stronger than our strongest, high achieving kids. God's strength is found in uber drivers and shared pots of stew. God's power is found in hearts tuned to worship, even when wildly out of tune.

Let's make our faith not about religion but about becoming fools for God. More singing, more cowbell...(those who know, know), more poetry, more healing, then we will see budgets and spreadsheets as the trellis upon which the song of God will bloom.

A poem from Rumi

"Lose yourself, Lose yourself in this love. When you lose yourself in this love, you will find everything.

Lose yourself, Lose yourself. Do not fear this loss, for you will rise from the earth and embrace the endless heavens.

Lose yourself, Lose yourself. Escape from this earthly form, for this body is a chain and you are its prisoner. Smash through the prison wall and walk outside with the kings and princes.

Lose yourself, Lose yourself at the foot of the glorious King. When you lose yourself before the King you will become the King.

Lose yourself, Lose yourself. Escape from the black cloud that surrounds you. Then you will see your own light as radiant as the full moon.

Now enter that silence. This is the surest way to lose yourself. . . .

What is your life about, anyway?—Nothing but a struggle to be someone, Nothing but a running from your own silence." *Rumi: In the Arms of the Beloved*

Happy Mid-Lenting,
Todd