FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
March 6, 2016
10:15 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: God’s “Foolishness” is Wiser Than Man’s Wisdom and His “Weakness” is Stronger Than Man’s Strength

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:18-25

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness\(^{(A)}\) to those who are perishing,\(^{(B)}\) but to us who are being saved\(^{(C)}\) it is the power of God.\(^{(D)}\) 19 For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”\(^{(E)}\)

20 Where is the wise person?\(^{(F)}\) Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age?\(^{(G)}\) Has not God made foolish\(^{(H)}\) the wisdom of the world?\(^{(I)}\) 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world\(^{(I)}\) through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save\(^{(J)}\) those who believe.\(^{(K)}\) 22 Jews demand signs\(^{(L)}\) and Greeks look for wisdom,\(^{(M)}\) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block\(^{(N)}\) to Jews and foolishness\(^{(O)}\) to Gentiles,\(^{(P)}\) but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God\(^{(Q)}\) and the wisdom of God.\(^{(R)}\) 25 For the foolishness\(^{(S)}\) of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness\(^{(T)}\) of God is stronger than human strength.
Corinth’s culture was noted for its debauchery and, in that respect, it has much in common with the current culture in our nation today. The Christians in Corinth wrestled with temptations that most of us will recognize. Paul planted the church in Corinth, but soon too much of Corinth began to grow in that church. Those problems needed correction, as did their understanding of the apostolic ministry. It’s in that note that the Apostle Paul wrote in the verse just prior to our text that God had sent him “to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, let the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” Our text expands on that great truth that

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Paul says, “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.” For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’” What a contrast! On one hand, many deem the message of a crucified Savior utter nonsense, not even worth considering. On the other hand, there are those for whom that same message has proven to be God’s power to save. The former are perishing in unbelief and headed to everlasting destruction as they’re convinced according to their limited human reason that the gospel is inane. And yet, we who’ve been led by God’s Spirit to put our faith in Jesus already possess eternal life since the gospel packs the power for salvation. This was God’s aim all along, as the quote from Isaiah shows. God nullifies mans’ intelligence and wisdom, rendering it invalid through the revelation of His own powerful saving wisdom.

Paul adds, “Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” Has worldly wisdom ever saved one lost soul? The scholar’s no help; the Jewish scribe or Greek sage can’t come to the aid of the sinner. Through the cross, God has shown every mortal viewpoint to be useless folly. All of man’s collective storehouse of information is but the greatest, most tragic idiocy if it’s used as the standard by which man judges God’s wisdom and the spiritual truths of His Word.

How worthless is man’s wisdom? Although the entire creation proclaims God’s wisdom, power and divine nature, yet the world’s wisdom has utterly failed to come to a knowledge of God or a genuine understanding of who He is or what He has done. Astronomers, astrophysicists, academics and gurus—yes, the greatest minds the world has ever known—all have failed miserably to really know God thru their own wisdom, reason and intellectual pursuits. God was pleased to save sinners like you and me and bring us to a true knowledge of Himself by this foolish message of the cross. It was God’s good pleasure to
laugh at the puny wisdom of the creature while demonstrating the loving “foolishness” of the Creator.

Through the foolishness of preaching God saves “those who believe.” The powerful message of Christ crucified and the faith it creates in the heart bring salvation to sinners like us. This was God’s good and loving pleasure, to save by grace through faith, thus ruling out all human merit and effort. To that end, it excludes no one. How brilliant! If our salvation were dependent on a high I.Q. or great learning or a noble mind or flawless character, then no one could or would ever be saved. Period. Since the gospel demands nothing from us, however, the door that Christ opened to heaven is open to all: young and old, rich and poor, no matter their ethnicity, social-standing, way of life or the sins they’ve committed! And so Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this not of yourselves, it is a gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do” (2:8-10).

Paul continues by stating, “Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” The Jews of Paul’s day, with their history chock full of signs and wonders and mighty miracles wanted more of the same. They weren’t satisfied with Jesus’ miracles and demanded more signs from heaven from Him. The real problem was their stubborn and proud self-righteousness which was offended by the idea of a suffering Savior and a crucified Messiah. In the hardness of their hearts, they refused—for the most part—to submit to the obedience of Christ and honor Him as their Lord. They resisted the Spirit’s efforts to bring them to repentance and to woo them to faith.

The Greeks, on the other hand, were consumed by their love for worldly wisdom. They wanted philosophy into which they could sink their mental teeth and chew on for a while before they digested it and gained what they could from it. They looked for logical proof and reasonable arguments that their intelligence could evaluate and then approve of. A crucified Savior who was God in the flesh? How absolutely absurd that was to Gentile thinking. Keep in mind, however, that these are the same “wise” philosophers that imagined that there was a panoply of gods that ran the show behind the world’s stage. Jews, Greeks and Gentiles of every stripe, it makes no difference. Sinful people naturally expect something else, something more, from God than what He gives them. He gives them heavenly wisdom and knowledge, and they want their own brand of “wisdom.”

To those, however, who have been called by the Holy Spirit to faith in Jesus, He is the Christ, the Lord’s Anointed Savior! Believing “Jews” and “Greeks”—a New Testament term for all non-Jews—know to be the power of God and the wisdom of God. God’s most glorious power is found in His atoning and saving love; in Jesus’ victory over sin, death and the devil; and in that great work of redemption that renders us righteousness in the Father’s eyes and secures eternal life for us.

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**Sunday Worship Service: 10:15 A.M. (Sunday School/Adult Bible Class 9am)**
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And God’s genius is revealed in His plan of salvation—a plan He set in motion before the world began—to provide eternal salvation for any and every sinner. Paul closes our text by stating unequivocally: “For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

The Greeks of Paul’s day certainly had no higher regard for worldly wisdom than do the people of our day. Man’s wisdom, knowledge and learning are exalted to the highest degree in our society, second only to the celebrity status of pro athletes and popular entertainers. In fact, some high-tech gurus like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Elon Musk seem god-like in the eyes of some. Granted, people don’t all follow the same leaders, but they are captivated by the human “wisdom” that emanates from the minds, labs and testing centers of their respective intellectual giants. There are those who accept everything that the latest scientific study “proves” only to “dis-prove” it after further evaluation. Others fall into lock-step with whatever the pop psychologists or the Dr. Oz’s and Dr. Phil’s or Oprah Winfrey’s of our culture tout as the latest and greatest cure-all for everything from toe-nail fungus to leukemia. Still others hitch their wagon to a particular political party, civic cause or environmental concern and make it their top priority. Of course, power still impresses and signs and wonders are still sought.

But we preach Christ crucified, especially during the season of Lent that we’re in the midst of right now. Lent affords us a wonderful opportunity every year to dig down to the foundation of our faith and get back to the basics of what we believe. It’s a time to focus on what sinful people like you and me, really, truly need. As we journey together toward Calvary’s cross—a sacred trek that ends on a hill outside Jerusalem’s walls at a bloody cross to which our Savior has been cruelly affixed—His dying words echo in our ears, “It is finished.” The sins of the world have been paid for entirely and eternally. No further sacrifice for sins is needed, for “The blood of Jesus, [God’s] Son, purifies us from every sin” as John wrote in his 1st epistle (1:7). This message of the cross will always appear foolish and weak in the eyes of many. But it’s in the message of the cross that we discover the true power and wisdom of God, for it is in that message that we find our eternal salvation!

The traditional designation for this Sunday—the 4th Sunday in Lent—is “Laetare,” the Latin word “Rejoice!” Both the Old Testament and the Gospel readings for today sound that note of joy in the midst of Lent. “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” the prophet Isaiah says, encouraging us: “Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.” And Luke recounts the parable of the forgiving father toward his returned son. And so on that consistent note, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the source of our joy: the message of Christ crucified. May that good news continue to give you a joy which the world with all its wisdom can never give, for God’s “Foolishness” is Wiser Than Man’s Wisdom and His “Weakness” is Stronger Than Man’s Strength! And it always will be, world without end. Amen.