

Sermon: Foolishness**Scripture: I Corinthians 1:18-31****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: March 4, 2018**

We are just a month away from Easter believe it or not and this year Easter is on April 1st which, oddly enough is April Fool's Day. But maybe that's just as it should be, because as Paul reminds us this morning, there really is something foolish about the claims of Christianity. A man with all these followers who swore that he was a savior but who was abandoned by practically every friend he had, arrested by the authorities, thrown in jail, tortured by soldiers, executed on a cross, and thrown in a tomb; dead, buried, and gone, end of story, until.... Actually he's back! He's resurrected from the dead. The story is not *over*, it's just beginning!

I mean, it is a little ridiculous. And it's not just ridiculous from our perspective as enlightened 21st century people who know now that people simply don't die and come back from the dead except in zombie movies. It was actually no less foolish back then 2000 years ago to most everyone who heard these followers of Jesus make such a claim. In fact it was so odd to believers that they needed a highly educated Jewish born roman citizen from Tarsus named Paul to help them understand and stay faithful to this strange story that they suddenly found themselves the bearers of. Paul was articulate and verbose and intellectual, and yet as Nick read for us this morning, there came a time in his writing and his explaining where he just had to throw up his hands and admit... I know, I know, it's all foolishness, it's ridiculous what I am saying about this brutalized and crucified man being the definitive revelation of God, but there you have it... and maybe, just

maybe God knows something we don't. Maybe just maybe God's ways and thoughts are so far from our ways and thoughts that God's wisdom looks like foolishness to us and our wisdom looks like foolishness to God. Isn't that quite possible? Isn't that even likely that if the Creator of the entire expansive and profoundly intricate universe were to communicate essential truth to the wee human mind that it would come strange and paradoxical and maybe even seeming foolish? If it came making sense – oh yeah, that's the answer to the utter mystery of life and human being – maybe then it should be even more suspect!

But that's not how it came. The definitive revelation of God to humanity came slant, to pull a phrase from Emily Dickenson. "Tell all the truth but tell it slant – success in circuit lies, too bright for our infirm delight, the truth's superb surprise, as lightning to the children eased with explanation kind, the truth must dazzle gradually, or every man be blind." The truth's stunning, superb surprise - that's what the crucifixion of Jesus was.

Paul says it is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. Because you see, God in mainline Jewish theology was primarily transcendent and a God of law, so God come in lowly human form, breaking Mosaic regulations and then cursed by being hung on a tree... was a stumbling block. And then in the face of Plato's philosophy of the form of Goodness and Beauty, you have a bloodied savior on the cross to contemplate... talk about foolishness. We might say, in the face of our American definition of success and victory, there comes a defeated and humiliated savior... talk about embarrassing. And in the face of our highly educated circles that we run in with the latest scholarship and most intricately focused practices, it's foolishness to speak of a magic

man who performed miracles and arose from the dead. It's no different now as it was then. And for many of us more liberal Christians, we have the added layer of the foolish ways Jesus and his cross has been used to justify all sorts of spurious claims of superiority and condemnation of others, his followers at times not lifting up the downtrodden but treading on the already down by using biblical faith to justify slavery or homophobia or warfare or whatever else.

But isn't it interesting that as defiled as his name and cross have been at times by the people who profess to be his followers, still Jesus himself remains purely himself. Even the most vociferous opponents to religion or Christianity do not dismiss or condemn Jesus himself, only interpretations of him. Somehow we all know him as "truth's superb surprise", God's telling of the truth but told slant, so that even the most sophisticated, educated, cynical of us fall foolishly silent before the mystery of it.

God's essential revelation to humanity comes as someone betrayed, suffering, broken and murdered... and then after the resurrection, a presence physically, materially absent. Isn't that strange? You know those Magic Eye books, if you let your gaze be relaxed from the chaos of pixels and shapes and colors there suddenly emerges a distinct 3D image? It might help to try it like that - relax the mind a little bit and go more with the heart, forget all you know or think you know, and just gaze upon the cross - literally or in your mind's eye - and what emerges is something beautiful out of the chaos, something that the mind cannot necessarily grasp but that the heart sure can.

The foolishness of the cross, the awfulness of Jesus' violent and suffering death, is essentially a revelation of love, of God's profound love

for me and for you, for all humanity, a reminder that in the most grim of human experiences even those that have been in our national and local news over these last couple of weeks, where surfaces the question “where is God in all this?” we remember this great revealed mystery that God IS the wounded and broken and murdered One weaving out of the deepest human misery somehow beauty and light and love again and again. Praise the foolishness of God and may we too be foolishly committed to the ways of Love, Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Come to the welcome table – to the Lord’s Supper – where God’s love through Jesus Christ is offered, freely, completely, without requirement or preconditions or obligations, only that you come open hands and open hearts to receive what is offered here. If you are a child or an adult, a believer or a questioner, a spiritual-but-not-religious type or a non-affiliated or not-sure-what-I-believe type, you are welcome here. If you are straight or gay, male, female or non-binary gender fluid, you are welcome here. Where ever you are on your spiritual journey, whatever peak or valley or pit you find yourself in at this juncture of your life, you are welcome to come here to receive God’s love in the form of bread and cup as sojourners have done across thousands of years. We are honored to receive you at Christ’s table, in his blessed name....