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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
March 2, 2022
Ash Wednesday

Passion Lesson: The Passover; Psalm Reading: Psalm 51:1-15
Hymns: 140:1-4; 358; 330; 313:2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

²⁰ Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of
this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did
not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the
message preached to save those who believe. ²² For Jews request a
sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ
crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks
foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the
foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is
stronger than men. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our crucified Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Handling a crisis

That is what world rulers are supposed to do. When a national or world crisis happens then the leaders of this world are supposed to weigh the options to address the crisis and chose the wisest possible way to handle and resolve the crisis. It happens all the time. We have government agencies to handle different types of crises. FEMA is there to address national weather disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes, to help those who were impacted by the event. The CDC is there for health-related crisis like COVID. The national security agencies are in place to give the President the advice necessary to make wise choices for international crises, like the current invasion of the Ukraine by Russia. Someone has got to be in charge. We all can't do it. We hope and pray that those in charge make wise choices and not foolish ones. But then people don't often agree on what is wise and what is foolish, and that's when it all gets political.

What about the crisis of sin? What are the options? And how should one weigh those options? Sin is by far the worst and most desperate of crises, and yet it is not often perceived that way. Most often the options are seen as what mankind can do to make this world a better place, and what we recommend for people to get them out of this mess brought into the world by sin. So, the most popular suggestion by far is that man work on resolving the problems and shortcomings in one's own life. We call that option the "**work-righteousness**" option. It comes in many decorative designs to fit your ethnic or national background, but down under they are all the same. It is widely endorsed as the wise option to follow. And then there is the option proposed by God, the cross of Christ. The natural response to this option is universal, I didn't say almost universal, I said the **natural** response to this option of the cross IS universal, and that is regarding --

THEME: The Cross as Foolishness.

Consider --

I. The Reasoning behind this conclusion that the cross is foolishness.

It starts with a faulty analysis of the nature and seriousness of the crisis of sin. Sin is considered by most in the world to be simply a

behavior problem. So, change one's behavior and the problem is solved. Some might go so far as to see it as a flaw in human character, but not one that can't be addressed with a concerted effort. Some religious traditions propose that may take more than a lifetime. Their ok with that. Mankind is willing to accept the ideas of thousands of years of sufferings for some poor fools in a place like purgatory, or the spinning through multiple lifetimes on earth with one degree or another of bad karma attached to make sure individual human spirits learn the necessary lessons to improve their character until they reach the bliss of Nirvana.

Now that's all deemed to be wise and admirable! The cross of Christ? – Not so much. Why not? The world has several problems with it. The idea of substitution is one. How can one individual suffer immensely because of the wrongs, (ok, they'll use the word, if they must) the **sins** of another person. A loving God wouldn't do that. You see the world doesn't even begin to comprehend the true magnitude of God's love that He would send His only begotten Son into the world just for this purpose. What purpose? To suffer on the behalf of others; to save **them**; to **deliver them** from what they justly deserve. So, God sent His only begotten Son to the cross.

The world says, *“That's just barbaric! We can't stand for that! That is foolish.”* Barbaric is what sin is, and the punishment it brings is severe beyond imagining.

But the world responds: *“Besides that, it's not fair! And why kill a person that was obviously a credit to humanity with His kindness and love and wisdom, one that set such a marvelous example for the rest of us? It doesn't make sense!”* So, the cross is deemed foolishness! According to the world, only an unthinking idiot would buy into the idea that another person's merit could benefit you, and that somebody who died a gruesome death rose to life and lives forevermore. That is the stuff of fairy tales, not something upon which to build one's life.

So, what about the cross as a solution for the crises of sin? It is nothing less than --

II. The Wisdom of God.

God alone comprehended the true corrupting power of sin. It brought death into the world, and that death started with the spirit of man. The dead can do nothing for themselves. That is the thing about death. This death spread upon all men, for all have sinned. (Romans 5:12) Sin became a part of man's nature starting with Adam's fall. So, if the crisis was to be addressed and resolved, it had to be done by another, not by mankind. None of us can redeem ourselves, much less our brother. We read the truth of this in the psalms: "*None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him—⁸ For the redemption of their souls is costly.*" (Psalms 79:7-8)

So, God intervened. God had a plan that did not give any glory to man or depend upon any contribution from man, not in the least. To rescue a fallen mankind God had to present a full and complete salvation. It had to include a perfect righteousness, and it had to include an all-atoning sacrifice for sin, a payment that was truly enough for all the sins of all mankind. The cross of Christ was the **only** possible solution for the crisis of sin.

The world demands proof. They demand that whatever "truth" we claim to hold, it must be subject to reason. It must sound reasonable. So, the truth of the cross has been rejected and spurned as falling short. The cross is deemed foolishness. But this "**foolishness**" comes to us from God. What the creation declares for all who will observe it, is that the Creator God, the only true God, is also the all-wise God. While in many areas the dark mind of man has declared the wisdom of God to be foolishness, this foolishness of the cross is seen as the most foolish of all.

For those of us who have been called to faith the message of the cross is wisdom, true and eternal wisdom that alone provides the solution for the crisis of sin, and that delivers us from death and eternal condemnation in hell. And so, we praise God for the fact our text declares so beautifully. "*The foolishness of God is wiser than men.*" (v.25) Here is the wisdom of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

(Sing hymn 179)