1 Corinthians 1:18 April 1, 2018

Easter Sunday!

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*A Fool for Christ*

Don’t think for a minute that just because it’s April Fool’s Day on this Easter Sunday that I’m going to have a good joke for you or pull some kind of a prank. I’ve never been that good at jokes and I’m pretty sure no one has ever accused me of being a prankster. I’m sorry if you were hoping for something like that today – but it’s just not me. However, we are going to circle around the theme of being foolish, coming from 1 Corinthians 1:18, on this incredibly fantastic day in the life of believers all over the world, and in the life of our congregation. So, let’s pray: *Good and gracious and all-giving God, prepare our hearts to accept your Word. Silence in us any voices but your own, so that we may hear your Word and also do it; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Have you ever done anything foolish? I don’t mean embarrassing, but foolish, meaning you did something that showed a lack of common sense or good judgement?

A couple of years ago I had a couple of hours between responsibilities and I really needed to clear my head. For me, the best way to do that is to get outside and get moving. I decided to go to the 1000 steps between Mt. Union and Huntingdon. I had never done the steps before and I figured this was a great opportunity. So, I got there and up I went. For someone with short legs, this was a big-time workout. I was huffing and puffing. But I made it to the top. I walked around up there, getting my heart rate back down to normal while enjoying the views. Then it was time to go back down. I was thinking that going down would be significantly easier than going up. Well, not with legs that felt like jelly and 58-year-old knees. About ¼ of the way down I realized that making this trip alone had been foolish. I had only seen maybe 4 people the whole time I was there and they were nowhere close. I hadn’t told anyone where I was going. I hadn’t taken any water. And if I slipped going down, chances were good I wouldn’t be getting back up. That’s the moment I called John to tell him where I was in case I didn’t come home by dark. It was foolish of me. Have you ever done something foolish?

Have you ever done something that others thought was foolish, but you knew you were doing the right thing? Forty-years ago next Sunday, John and I got married at ages 19 and 20 to the cries of the naysayers. We were too young, they said. I needed to finish my degree, they said. We didn’t have enough money, they said. Three degrees, 9 different addresses, three children, 8 grandchildren (with the 9th on the way), and a whole lot of lessons learned, and prayers prayed later – I think we proved that (at some level) we knew what we were doing.

Have you ever been called a fool or had people roll their eyes at you for believing all the stuff about Jesus, for your faithfulness to him and his Church, giving up a precious sleep-in morning to come here every Sunday morning to study and to worship with other believers, giving a portion of your time to serve others in Jesus’ name, and give your hard-earned money away in an offering plate? Have you ever been scoffed at for choosing to trust God when so many others are quick to say, “If there is a God who lets all this bad stuff happen to people, even people who are faithful to him, I want no part of him.” Have you ever been called a fool for Christ?

Do you remember Corrie Ten Boom? She was talked about in our last Lenten video. Her sister, her brothers and her father were involved in helping Jews escape persecution by the Nazis in The Netherlands. It was considered crazy to get mixed up in a thing like this and defy the Nazi laws by sheltering such people. Even other people, including the pastor from their church warned them how foolish it was – reminding them that the Bible says they should obey the government. But the Ten Boom family remained firm in their conviction that this is what Christ was calling them to do. They decided that if anyone knocked on their door looking for help, they were not going to turn them away. Corrie’s father said, *“To lose our lives for them – that would be the greatest honor that could come to our family.”*

Jesus was considered foolish – touching lepers, sharing a meal with the biggest crooks in town (tax collectors), and allowing himself to be captured, beaten, and crucified. For what? For being compassionate, biblically principled, truthful, prayerful, faithful, merciful, brave, and bold enough to stand up for true righteousness. He and those who followed him were called everything in the book – probably including being called fools. Until…

Until the resurrection. Until, all of a sudden, the one who was dead was no longer dead! Until over 500 people saw him alive and believed in him, which turned into 5000, into 500,000, into 5 million, into 500 million over the centuries – including you and me today. If we’re fools, we certainly are not fools alone.

The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:18, *“****18****For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* The paraphrase of the scripture called The Voice puts it this way, *“For people who are stumbling toward ruin, the message of the cross is nothing but a tall tale for fools by a fool. But for those of us who are already experiencing the reality of being rescued and made right, it is nothing short of God’s power.”*

To the 70 million Christians who have been killed for their faith in Jesus over the centuries, who simply could not and would not deny him, the message of the cross is what gave them the courage to love their enemies even to the end. Foolish? To some. Not to those who believe.

Here’s the core of the problem for those who don’t believe. Those who don’t believe, don’t want to believe that they are sinners. They want to believe that they are good people who sometimes do things that are wrong, but that they can change their behavior if they really want to long or short-term. Besides, who’s to say whether a thing is wrong or not? What might be wrong for you isn’t necessarily wrong for me…

Until a person is awakened to the reality of sin (as a problem) in their lives that needs to be solved because their sin is keeping them from developing a relationship with a holy God, until they have been awakened to the reality that nothing we can do on our own is going to get rid of it, thereby solving the problem, and awakened to the reality that Christ alone can provide the solution to their sin-problem and reconcile us to God, then the cross, what it represents, and the devotion of those who believe is nothing but foolishness to them.

There are a lot of people in the world today who see nothing but foolishness when they look at the cross, who see nothing but old-fashioned judgmental hypocrites when they see us coming out of the church building each Sunday, and who have no one truly to cling to during life and after death.

This is why the Church exists – to do whatever we can to help those who are perishing see the reality of their sin problem and help them to reach out and cling to Christ. As a congregation, we invest faithfully in our local communities in so many different ways to help everyone see and experience the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ through what we do as a group together (like the community meals) and as individuals. We are the gathered body of Christ here today, but when we are scattered throughout the week we are still the body of Easter-people – taking hope and help wherever he sends us. We give very intentionally and persistently to our friends and neighbors.

But today, we’ve been called to give way, way beyond our borders to rescue the perishing in Lithuania, in Mozambique, Africa, and in countries that are hostile to the Gospel message - people we will never know this side of heaven! The offering we are being called to give today, the fullness and the expanse of it, could be called foolish by some. We have to pay our bills, right? But guess what? Since we made the commitment a couple of months ago to give in this way on Resurrection Sunday, God has given us an increase in offerings that make no sense to the merely logical thinker. And this is what God does. Over and over again. He brings new life when we are faithful to do what he asks us to do. We cannot out-give God. We mustn’t try to limit God. Everything in the whole wide world belongs to him! He brings more to us than we could ask for or imagine! When things seem to be upside down and we look to the Lord for guidance, he shows us the way to make things right. They may not make sense to the world, and others might say we have lost good judgement. But I know it’s true that in this sanctuary right now we have story after story after story of how God brought something good and strong and beautiful out of something hard as we stayed the course with him. Sometimes it takes a while, but He will do it, as we trust him by following what he tells us to do in his Word.

Dallas Holm wrote the following lyrics to his song, “I am a Fool for Christ.”

I'll be a fool for You, Jesus, that's just what I'll be.  
People tell me that I'm a fool for giving my life away,  
But I've learned not to think too highly of what the people say.  
'Cause you have given more to me than I ever gave to you,  
So if it's all the same to them I think I'll be a fool.  
  
I'll be a fool for You, Jesus, that's just what I'll be.  
Crazy in love with God above, that's all right with me.  
I'll be a fool for You, Jesus, that's just what I'll do  
I guess I just don't know no better than to be in love with You.  
  
When I gave my life to You, my friends they were hard to find,  
They seemed to all kinda stay away; They thought I'd lost my mind.  
How could you give your life away like some kind of crazy fool?  
They would ask and I would say: Here's what I'm gonna do.  
  
I'll be a fool for You, Jesus, that's just what I'll be.  
Crazy in love with God above, that's all right with me.  
I'll be a fool for You, Jesus, that's just what I'll do  
I guess I just don't know no better than to be in love with You.

Until you open your heart to Jesus, until you say that first “Yes! I believe,” everything about the cross, about the fuss of the resurrection, about the sacrificial ministries of the church will seem foolish to you. That’s because the Holy Spirit hasn’t come to be your inside guide. But when you say “Yes,” a real “Yes” based on a real awareness of your need for a Savior (because of the sin problem), you will experience a death and a resurrection of your own. It might seem very small at first, maybe even inconsequential, which Satan will use to try to convince you that your “Yes” was nothing but a foolish word at a time of weakness.

But over time, you will notice some changes. Over time there will be an increasing desire to follow God’s Word, to be with God’s people, to sing songs of worship to him, to love people you never thought you could love, and to forgive others much more quickly and easily. Over time, if your “Yes” is “Yes,” the ways and the will of God will no longer seem foolish to you, and you’ll realize that you too have join the great company of the redeemed. You have become a fool for Christ, ready and willing to follow wherever he leads until the day you are welcomed into that wonderful place called Heaven!

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples in the Upper Room. He gave them a new commandment that night after washing their feet. He said, “Love one another, as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.” On that same night He then took bread, and after giving thanks he blessed it and he broke it and he gave it to them saying, “This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also, Jesus took the cup and said “This cup is the new covenant, sealed in my blood, and poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you.” They didn’t understand everything. They hardly understood anything he said that night. But he knew that after his death and resurrection, they would get it. They would see what he meant, and they would cherish those words and that symbolic yet real communion meal – and they would carefully pass it on so that you and I can share and receive it just as they did. All who confess faith in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord – including and especially those who are saying their first YES to him today – are welcome to share in this holy meal on this resurrection day! Let us pray: Merciful God, we know that we are not what we should be. We know that we have failed to follow you in word and in deed, by what we have done and what we have left undone. Forgive us for our prideful ways, for our sloth, for our inattention to the most important, eternal things. Forgive us for thinking we didn’t need you. Forgive our half-hearted ‘yes’ and our ‘maybe’ and our ‘not now, later.’ Forgive us for taking you and your grace for granted. Hear us as we confess silently before you. (Silence). Thank you for your mercy. We receive it today with grateful hearts. Amen.

I’m forgiven, because you were forsaken.

I’m accepted, you were condemned.

I’m alive and well, your spirit is within me

Because you died and rose again.

Amazing love, how can it be?

That you my King would die for me?

Amazing love, I know it’s true.

It’s my joy to honor you,

In all I do, I honor you.

You are my king. You are my king.

Jesus, you are my king. You are my king.

Amazing love, how can it be?

That you my King would die for me?

Amazing love, I know it’s true.

It’s my joy to honor you,

In all I do, I honor you.

Amen.