

Psalm 27:1.4-9

Isaiah 9:1-4

Matthew 4:12-23

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Foolish Unity

10Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. 11For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." 13Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

14I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

17For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. 18For 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.

I was walking across a bridge one day, and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump. I ran over and said: "Stop. Don't do it."

"Why shouldn't I?" he asked.

"Well, there's so much to live for!"

"Like what?"

"Are you religious?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Me too. Are you Christian or Buddhist?"

"Christian."

"Me too. Are you Catholic or Protestant?"

"Protestant."

"Me too. Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?"

"Baptist."

"Wow. Me too. Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?"

"Baptist Church of God."

"Me too. Are you original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?"

"Reformed Baptist Church of God."

"Me too. Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?"

He said: "Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915."

I said: "Go ahead and jump, heretic scum!" and walked away.

I don't remember if I've ever shared that joke with anyone in the pulpit before, so if I have, my apologies. I just think this is a perfect example of the core human problems in dealing with the challenges to Christian unity. And these problems go as far back as to the very beginning of our faith.

The plain truth of the matter is that at the very beginning of this joke "I" was concerned about the well being of a human being – and according to Paul from the sermon scripture, I should have stopped right there. "17For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. 18For 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 foolishness needed to be focusing on Christian or even Human Unity is a fascinating idea. He gives in to the critics and says basically, "Hey – you're right – this stuff I've been preaching is foolish, but it is wiser than anything here on earth!"

Definition: Foolishness:

1. Lacking or exhibiting a lack of good sense or judgment; silly
2. Resulting from stupidity or misinformation; unwise
3. Arousing laughter; absurd or ridiculous
4. Immoderate or stubborn; unreasonable
5. Embarrassed; abashed
6. Insignificant; trivial

Paul is saying that the message of the cross is all of that to those whose lives are focused only on this time on earth. The power of the cross means *life* to those who understand that this apparent foolishness is the greatest wisdom and power there is. *The*

power of the cross is the truth that trusting in Jesus' life and our inheritance is the most meaningful thing we can do with our lives.

Of the 8 times that the word "foolishness" is found in the NRSV of the Bible, 6 of them are in 1 Corinthians. In this first letter to the Corinthians, considered one of the most valuable of Paul's letters, he seems to be equating this 'foolishness' with being in some way an awareness that is actually greater than what humans could truly understand. Faith and trust in Jesus seems like foolishness to those who haven't experienced it. And I am sure that many people were trying very hard to make the early believers feel like they were idiots for believing that this young upstart criminal was the Messiah. And we have them still today.

It is clear that Paul believed the mentality of philosophical and theological *competition* is foolishness. What is important is that we all find a way to *care about* each other and to be good to each other. He doesn't want to compete with anyone over who did their baptism better than the other – or whose baptism ranked higher in the social circles, it is God that does the essential part of a baptism, not the one doing it – or even how it is done! This is something we all tend to forget sometimes. The mysteries of the spiritual rites all belong to God alone, regardless of the human frailties of the pastors performing them.

When the disciples were competing over who would sit on which side of Jesus when he came into his power, they did not understand where Jesus' power was to be or what role they were to play in it. Jesus showed them that he wanted them to serve each other and sacrifice their own lives for the betterment of others. *Social hierarchy has no place in the spiritual realm where the trinity works.*

So all this then begs the question – why is it that we Christians on this earth seem to cling to our ecumenical differences as if the doctrines of each denomination may in some way actually define us more clearly *to God* as, "the ones who know best"? I fully accept the fact that there is a variety of ways to worship God and sense the power of spirituality. I embrace and enjoy the richness of the diverse ways humans sing the praises of God and I thrill in all the creative ways humans experience the holy. Paul is merely asking us to be cautious – for we humans have a tendency to want to rank ourselves. Now this is foolish.

For when we start to find ways of classifying each other we show that we are truly limited in our knowledge of ourselves, each other, and the way God is working in our lives. For one thing, humans can often find in others traits that we are avoiding seeing in ourselves – ones that aren't actually there in the other. It is called projection. Definition from Wikipedia:

Psychological projection or projection bias is a psychological defense mechanism where a person unconsciously denies their own attributes, thoughts, and emotions, which are then ascribed to the outside world, such as to the weather, or to other people. Thus, it involves imagining or projecting that others have those feelings.

Projection reduces anxiety by allowing the expression of the unwanted unconscious impulses or desires without letting the conscious mind recognize them.

An example of this behavior might be blaming another for self failure. The mind may avoid the discomfort of consciously admitting personal faults by keeping those feelings unconscious, and redirect their libidinal satisfaction by attaching, or "projecting," those same faults onto another.

See how easily we can even fool ourselves when we begin to try to classify and define others? And yet we feel like we are on the cutting edge of human knowledge.

Another problem with our human tendency to want to classify others is that we are all with God in the process of becoming. None of us would be here or even interested in knowing anything about faith, or love or peace or personal growth if we did not know that there is a vast potential of life out there and we cannot know from one minute to the next how we will be changed by them.

This is the foolishness of humanity to believe that we can know others or even fully know ourselves. Paul is asking us all to try to stay as long as possible in that realm of faith where we are in awe of God – in awe of who Jesus was and what he did – *in awe* of each other and our journeys. And if we are in awe – and we see someone standing on the edge ready to jump – we will instantaneously go to them to stop them. Because our hearts are full of the compassion that Jesus showed us. And this is the reason that a week of Prayer for Christian Unity was called into being. AMEN