

Isaiah 9:1-4

Nonetheless, those who were in distress won't be exhausted. At an earlier time, God cursed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but later he glorified the way of the sea, the far side of the Jordan, and the Galilee of the nations.^[b]

²^[c] The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.

³ You have made the nation great;
you have increased its joy.

They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest,
as those who divide plunder rejoice.

⁴ As on the day of Midian, you've shattered the yoke that burdened them,
the staff on their shoulders,
and the rod of their oppressor.

Psalms 27:1, 4-9

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Should I fear anyone?

The Lord is a fortress protecting my life.

Should I be frightened of anything?

⁴ I have asked one thing from the Lord—
it's all I seek:

to live in the Lord's house all the days of my life,
seeing the Lord's beauty
and constantly adoring his temple.

⁵ Because he will shelter me in his own dwelling
during troubling times;

he will hide me in a secret place in his own tent;
he will set me up high, safe on a rock.

⁶ Now my head is higher than the enemies surrounding me,
and I will offer sacrifices in God's tent—
sacrifices with shouts of joy!

I will sing and praise the Lord.

⁷ Lord, listen to my voice when I cry out—
have mercy on me and answer me!

⁸ Come, my heart says, seek God's face.^[a]
Lord, I do seek your face!

⁹ Please don't hide it from me!
Don't push your servant aside angrily—
you have been my help!
God who saves me,
don't neglect me!
Don't leave me all alone!

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

10 Now I encourage you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Agree with each other and don't be divided into rival groups. Instead, be restored with the same mind and the same purpose. 11 My brothers and sisters, Chloe's people gave me some information about you, that you're fighting with each other. 12 What I mean is this: that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," "I belong to Apollos," "I belong to Cephas," "I belong to Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were you baptized in Paul's name? 14 Thank God that I didn't baptize any of you, except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that nobody can say that you were baptized in my name! 16 Oh, I baptized the house of Stephanas too. Otherwise, I don't know if I baptized anyone else. 17 Christ didn't send me to baptize but to preach the good news. And Christ didn't send me to preach the good news with clever words so that Christ's cross won't be emptied of its meaning.

18 The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved.

Matthew 4:12-23

¹² Now when Jesus heard that John was arrested, he went to Galilee.¹³ He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum, which lies alongside the sea in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ This fulfilled what Isaiah the prophet said:

¹⁵ *Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,*

alongside the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles,

¹⁶ *the people who lived in the dark have seen a great light,*

and a light has come upon those who lived in the region and in shadow of death.^[a]

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to announce, "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!"

¹⁸ As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, because they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," he said, "and I'll show you how to fish for people." ²⁰ Right away, they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ Continuing on, he saw another set of brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father repairing their nets. Jesus called them and²² immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues. He announced the good news of the kingdom and healed every disease and sickness among the people.

Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

“Wise men say only fools rush in...” I can’t help but think of April right now, April who lives with Billy and Bridgette Crigler, April who loves her some Elvis. One day, as Bridgette worked on some tasks in the sanctuary, April had gotten out of her wheelchair to sit in the chairs – and April loves those chairs, though that’s not central to this story – but on that day, I began to play an Elvis playlist off of YouTube, because April loves all music, but April especially loves the King’s music. Only fools rush in, and today we hear a word of foolishness.

This famous lyric from Elvis arises from a much earlier quote from Alexander Pope, an 18th century poet, who wrote that “fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” Pope was the wise man about whom Elvis sang. Now, as you might expect with most any cryptic

piece of wisdom, a number of academics argue over the precise meaning of this proverb. The line itself exists in the midst of forty stanzas, each of them with lines equally confounding. I tried to read them and I got all sorts of lost. So, I went to the sage of our age to help clarify the meaning. Of course I'm speaking about Google. The great search engine in the cloud offered up this meaning: "people without good sense or judgment will have no hesitation in tackling a situation that even the wisest would avoid." Foolishness, it seems, implies a lack of worldly wisdom, a willingness or even perhaps a determination to dive into situations deemed avoidable. Fools go where they don't need to go, take risks they don't need to take.

The cross is a fool's errand. It's an errand done by a fool, for fools. Thank God for that! Surely the wisest of people would avoid the cross. No one wants to bear it themselves, certainly, nor does anyone want to contemplate its grotesque, gruesome work. All prevailing wisdom suggests that death on a cross leads only to

death. But fools do not trust prevailing wisdom, not even the prevailing wisdom of the angels who fear to tread the path of the cross. Instead, fools hold fast to hope that God's goodness will always, eventually prevail.

Just think of how foolish Jesus's invitation is: "Come, follow me, and I'll show you how to fish for people." Now, I don't mean to say that Jesus was baiting actual hooks with actual worms and expecting to reel in real people. No, Jesus is much more foolish than that. Jesus expects that carpenters and fishermen to forsake their blue collar jobs for no income, to leave the families and homes that they built to become homeless, to pass beyond their circles of control and go into the realm of God's sovereignty where one thing is always true: self-sacrifice is essential. How foolish can it be to expect someone to forsake their fortunes for the good of others, especially in our culture? To lay down their wealth so they might serve people instead of money, to abandon their gilded penthouses

to take residence amongst the people, take up their crosses and follow Jesus's commands to care for others at the expense of yourself? To give up your social standing so that you might lift others up? To refute the notions that might equals right or that wealth equals eternal value and instead declare that the poor and poor in spirit are the blessed inheritors of God's kingdom?

Foolishness. Most certainly foolishness.

Paul, 2,000 years ago, told us for the first time that *the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved.* What is it that makes the cross and its message foolish? Part of what we must remember is that fools, those initially called foolish in ancient Rome, were something like jesters. Now, we think of these as comedic relief, but the role of jesters is much more significant. They were social critics who use their commentary to point out the absurdities of the ruling class, and in some

circumstances, to lay the groundwork for revolution. In fact, Christians weren't the only group persecuted by Roman officials. Fools were considered so dangerous to the stability of the empire that, at various times, they were sought out and slaughtered. This is why we think of minstrels as wanderers, not because they were restless with wanderlust, but because they had to constantly be on the move to avoid crucifixion themselves.

So, when Paul refers to the cross as foolishness for those who are being destroyed, he's playing on an image common to 1st century readers but then flipping it on his head. Romans expected crucifixion to destroy the powerless in the world - the cross is supposed to kill the fools - but the cross of Jesus destroyed the power of the world. The jesters, the fools that so often found themselves tortured for their critique of the emperor, became a paradigm for overthrowing the power of the emperor.

Even more foolish than a call to fish for people is the belief, the trust, that the cross, Rome's favored form of capital punishment, is the power of God to save us, that this instrument of death would instead become the doorway to life. Only fools rush in where angels fear to tread, and for all of human history, no angel dared to endure the suffering of the cross. Surely this Jesus must himself be a fool.

So here's my question. What precisely has the wisdom of the world gotten us anyway? What progress has the wisdom of the world made? Now, I don't mean the advances in science that allow us to vaccinate against otherwise deadly diseases or the advances in engineering that allow us to circumnavigate the world in just days. That God-inspired knowledge, and the associated skills, have indeed given us many things, but they aren't the world's wisdom itself. Rather, the world's wisdom treats this knowledge with artificial scarcity and prevents the majority of the world from accessing these skills. The wisdom of the world prefers to monetize rather

than share these resources, so only a few become rich and the vast majority of us remain subject to those few. The wisdom of the world declares that that might equals right, that wealth equals eternal value. What does that do for us? What does that do for you?

What it does for us is keep us in line with the political and capital industrial complexes that want to control our lives. What it does is try to limit our ability to actually live the life that God's called us to live, free from any bondage except one blessed tie that binds us to the death and resurrection of Jesus. What it does for us is cast shadows over people who were created in God's image, depriving them of the light and life they were given in their creation. The wisdom of the world doesn't think we're worth all that much, and the more that we promulgate the status quo, the more we succumb to that wisdom, albeit unintentionally, that looks to most of us as worthless.

Perhaps worst of all, the wisdom of the world divides us up from one another, pitting differently disadvantaged groups against one another. It challenges our unity in the Gospel, our commonality in Christ. Jim Crow was one such piece of the world's prevailing wisdom, that deceptive mantra of "separate but equal." Martin Luther King Jr. noted this prevailing wisdom in the world from the State Capitol of Montgomery Alabama, after a long March from Selma to protest the lack of civil rights afforded to African Americans in that state. In Dr. King's words,

It may be said of the Reconstruction era that the southern aristocracy took the world and gave the poor white man Jim Crow... And when (the poor white) wrinkled stomach cried out for the food that his empty pockets could not provide, he ate Jim Crow, a psychological bird that told him that no matter how bad off he was, at least he was a white man, better than the black man.

That's the wisdom of the world at work, for not only did it pit poor whites against African Americans, but in so doing, it reinforced the power of those at the top by questioning the dignity of all others

and playing on their fears of scarcity. The wealthy. The political elite. Those who benefited from the status quo told lies to ensure their wisdom, and therefore their wealth and power, would never be questioned.

This is the kind of worldly wisdom that's destroyed by the cross. Anywhere that you see this kind of logic, or hear this kind of rhetoric even couched in Christian language, know that God's very intent is to destroy it, to bury in the grave that Jesus leaves behind. What seems foolish to the world's wisdom is foolish only because they're trusting the lies of the status quo instead of the truth of the Great I AM. God intends to turn the world upside down, so what looks like death, even the gruesome death of crucifixion, has the power of life. What looks like power to this world - the kind of monetized, militarized influence that seems to rule the day - is being crushed at the foot of the cross.

Though that power is crushed, though, God's hope, God's salvific desire, is to bring the people once swayed by the wisdom of the world into the foolishness of the cross. God does not seek to destroy us, but to eradicate all falsehoods that seek our allegiance so only one thing remains: the foolishness of the cross, which is the power of God. It may not look like much, but through it, we're all coming to look like Christ. Indeed, through the cross, all creation is finding the road to resurrection. Amen.