

Foolishness Exodus 20:1-17; I Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22; Psalm 19 3-19-06

It often surprises me; when I sit down to focus on the sermon or meditation for the week, just where it is my mind and memory take me.

As I pondered “foolishness” and our human condition, some musical themes popped into my head such as “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,” and “The Fool on the Hill.” But the most persistent memory that nudged me was a quote from Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” As many of us may recall, the character, Puck, who was a mischievous fairy, upon observing the actions of the humans around him, said “Lord, what fools these mortals be.” Upon a little reflection, I thought, “My goodness, that is what Paul is saying in a different way, isn’t it?”

Of course, Paul was dealing with the church in Corinth, a notorious church that could give any other church in history a run for its money for being foolish in the way the members treated one another and in the way they tried to live out the faith that had been delivered to them by its founders.

The church was located in the Roman province of Achaia. Corinth was a very important Greek city and the church there had been established by Paul. There was much that went on there, thus Paul penned at least 2 letters, probably more, to try to help the church survive. There were many little brushfires he tried to stamp out and there always seemed to be a variety of matters that divided the little congregation.

In his writing he spoke against the members suing one another, battling over who had been baptized by the best of those who baptized, who had the most useful spiritual gifts and about who should lead the church. This church, as was the case with all of the early churches, did not survive. This was probably caused in part by the foolishness of the members—a foolishness they most likely tried to shroud in a cloak of wisdom and sophistication.

It was tough to keep a church together in a town where there was a pagan temple on every corner. The temptations were many as were the challenges. The tendency the members seemed to have, to be diverted by petty squabbles, caused them to lose their focus on what it was that really mattered. They were together to live the gospel of Christ and to carry it to others in their city.

Paul, in an attempt to help the church discover the way in which it was to walk, wrote one of the most beautiful passages that exists, later in this letter, on the subject of love. It appears that his words fell on deaf ears. Those familiar words are: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. . . .When I was a child I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, when I became an adult I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part: then I will know fully. And now faith, hope and love abide and the greatest of these is love.”

The church members in Corinth could never get their act together and move into the future. They could never mature in their faith and realize that at the base of their existence was love, a powerful force that would take them through all the trials and tribulations they would face. If they would only begin to regard one another through the eyes of love, Paul told them, they would see in one another all the gifts necessary for the church to survive and thrive. But they would not see.

Paul was also trying to help the church members in Corinth understand that no matter how wise they thought themselves to be in an earthly sense, they were not. All of human wisdom, he reminded them, was less in value than God's foolishness.

He went on to remind them that none of them were wise or powerful or of noble birth. God did not choose those people to be the bearers of the Christ's message. He chose the foolish, the humble, to confound the wise.

During the season of Lent we are supposed to look at ourselves and understand, from the life and teachings and death of Christ, that we are to be humble creatures. Ash Wednesday begins this season by reminding us that we have come from the dust and that we will return to it. All of us.

Keeping this in mind, we are to take some time during this season to reflect on our lives and learn that we are no better than anyone else in the eyes of God. We might like to think we are, but we are not. Granted many of us have accomplished much in life and there is bound to be at least a little pride in what we have managed to do. But, we are never to let what we have accomplished in life overshadow all it is we have not done. Those sins of omission that all of us possess.

What is it we have not done? Where is it we have not reached out for growth and maturity in our faith journeys? Most of us certainly have not done all we can do for others. There is always a little more that is needed and if we are able to fulfill those needs we must plan to do so. We have not all taken the time and patience we should to listen to one another and try to understand just where someone else comes from in their thought process. We have not always realized that others are as valuable as we are and as loved by God. We have slipped a bit in forgiving others. There are many ways we have fallen short of all we are called to do to walk beside people we meet on our journey through life.

And what of our own spiritual journeys? Have we done anything to progress along the pathway to a closer relationship and a better understanding of God? God did not create us with such wonderful minds to have us sit in one place and never think new thoughts about our Creator. God did not make us to be locked into a place in our faith from which we are never to stir. God created us with lively curiosity about how things work in our world. God created us to grow beyond where we are in our lives and to become all that we can become--- to keep on knocking, seeking and asking that the doors to increased understanding and knowledge may open to us.

Each of us knows that through Christ we have learned that it is our task to carry the good news of his message with us wherever we go. We need not carry a Bible with us or erect a soapbox from which to issue our thoughts, we need instead to live out our lives in the best imitation of Christ possible. We all know we have a distance to go to do this if we are honest with ourselves and, with a measure of humility realize where we are right now. We can do what is needed to be done, if, in our foolishness, we do not allow ourselves to be diverted from the call God has on our lives. The church in Corinth ceased to exist because its members lost sight of their goal. They focused too much on the things of this earth and turned from the things that were of God. We can always choose the pathway we want to follow. We all need to choose wisely. Amen