

Lent 3 3/4/18
1 Corinthians 1:18-31 B

THE WORD OF THE CROSS IS FOLLY TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING, BUT TO US WHO ARE BEING SAVED IT IS THE POWER OF GOD.

In preparing for today's sermon, I came across a Bible passage that describes me pretty well. Well, at least it describes me some of the time. Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Yup, that's me. It's not that I'm a thoroughgoing atheist – an atheist being one who believes there is no God. What I am saying is that I have plenty of atheist-like moments when I don't trust the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul says, "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Glory be to Jesus – I am not one of those who are perishing; for Jesus died, and rose and ascended for me. To that I say: Thanks be to God. That's why I observe Lent by hanging onto His cross for dear life. I'm just saying that there are plenty of times in my life when I forget Him in whom I have believed. There are times when I forget that He is able to keep what I have entrusted to Him. There are plenty of times when I imagine that I have to do it on my own (2 Timothy 1:12). That's right – the problem is not God; it's the weakness of my mortal flesh.

And you know what? I'm guessing you are not all that different. Do you have times in your life – like when the doctor says, "There's nothing more we can do. Make the most of the time you have left;" your spouse who once said "I do," now doesn't; your child, your pride and joy, says, "I hate you;" your boss has said, "I have to let you go;" – things like that make you forget the power of God is best in our weakness. When we

foolishly forget, when we have atheist-like moments, there's a simple explanation and it's deep down in your heart and mine. We're born with sin. Sin doesn't simply mean we're born prone to mistakes. It means we are born with fear of God and without trust in God (Augsburg Confession 2). And, that's why you and I sometimes act like fools. And that sin lurks with us, it clings to us, and it wants to show its power. It wants proof that satisfies its fallen reason. It wants signs and wonders. Sin wants us to walk by sight, not by faith (cf. 1 Cor 5:7).

You know how it is, Dear Child of God. "For those who love God all things work together for good," the Bible assures us (Rom 8:28). Jesus Himself comforts us, "No one will snatch [my sheep] out of My hand" (Jn 10:28). But, if God in His mercy sends us sorrow, toil, or woe – flood, drought, loss of income, marriage troubles, child troubles, shootings -- what do we say? "I don't like you, God. You need to do a better job, God. So, until you get your act together, I'll be my own god. Thank you very much."

Deep in the impenetrable darkness our human reason is our insistence that we have everything explained to us. We think ourselves so wise, that we sit in judgement of God. The word of the cross is folly to our fallen reason.

Today God says, "No! The weakness of the cross is the right way." It's the right way, because it's God's way. So, let's leave our natural folly behind and realize again that the "foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25).

Jesus in the Weakness and the Strength of God. And in Him, God does for you what you cannot do for yourself. The Weakness of God is born into this world to save you.

All those times when you thought yourself wiser than God; all those times you sat in judgment of God; all those times you did not fear, love, and trust in God above all things; all those times the Weakness of God carried to Calvary's cross. There upon that cross, all of God's wrath and punishment for your distrust, for your sitting in judgement of God, for all the folly and foolishness of your sin was poured out upon the only-begotten Son of God. He pours it all out on Jesus because He is your substitute and takes upon His own body the death you deserve. Jesus died for you, for your sins, but death and the grave could not hold Him. Jesus, the Strength of God, rose again the 3rd day, so that you would have forgiveness, life, and salvation.

God the Holy Spirit enlightens you, Dear Child of God. That means the 3rd Person of the Trinity makes you wise unto salvation in Christ Jesus, so that you trust, rejoice, and find comfort in Jesus – and in Jesus alone. He does that by means of the baptism font, His table, and His Word. Just as Jesus drove the money changers and their sin from the Temple, through these means, the Holy Spirit drives out your distrust in God and your love of sin.

You live in Jesus, so you do fear, love, and trust in God above all things, just as Jesus did. You don't want another God. You want the God who saved you from sin, death, and hell. You want the God who works all things for your good. You delight to do His will.

You know that will because God has given you His 10 Commandments, which we heard in our today's Old Testament lesson.

- That in which you fear, love, and trust in above all things is your God.
- Call upon God's name in every trouble and believe His Word.

- Respect authority. Respect marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman. Respect life, including the life of the unborn, the elderly, and the infirm. Respect the property of others. Be content with what you have and who you are.

And, we dare not overlook those words that precede the 10 Commandments. God says, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods” (Ex 20:2-3). The 10 Commandments teach us one thing – God gives Himself to us to be our God. He is our Savior. He is our Redeemer. The things of this world, the ways of this world, are not. The ways of this world, like the Egyptians, make us slaves. Do you really want to complain about the weakness of God? When we do not fear, love, and trust in God, it’s like going back to the slavery of Egypt. And St. Paul says this, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Ga 5:1).

We do walk by faith and not by sight. We do fear, love and trust in God above all things, including our reason. In faith, we do believe that the cross is the power of God to save us from sin, death, and even ourselves. We rejoice in the forgiveness, life, and salvation that is ours. We hold them dear in our hearts because they are not our doing, they are God’s gift to us sinners from the cross of Jesus Christ.

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no god.’” Let’s leave that folly behind.

To God be the Glory. Amen.