

I Corinthians 1:18-31

Dear Friends in Christ,

In 1967, Clark H. Pinnock wrote a book entitled, "Set Forth Your Case - An Examination of Christianity's Credentials." I have made reference to it on several occasions. Pinnock stated what many of us knew was coming and, more importantly, what Scripture clearly foresaw. He wrote: "Man is holy. The most lurid display of perversion and sadism is culturally significant. Whatever is, is right. At last the philosophy of Marquis de Sade may win the day." Well, it's no longer "may win the day." For the most part, the "day" has been won. For awhile.

It's where human wisdom has brought us: The want of godlessness. It hamstring decency and destroys life. Our text says it: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing..." (v. 18a)

The walk with Jesus to Calvary is not for those hungry for the thinking of this world. The walk with Jesus is for the most unlikely; for those who are brought to see who they really are. *It's about what God does - for us:*

CALLS

I. Not the Self-Glorified.

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom (that is, through fallen human wisdom), it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles... (vv. 21-23)

Again, Paul writes, "Jews demand signs...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews." The reference to Jews is more than a reference to a specific people. It's a type of thinking. It's that old thinking that sinful humans can win God's love by works or by who they are.

Again, Paul writes, "Greeks seek wisdom...but we preach Christ crucified...folly to Gentiles." The reference to "Gentiles" is a reference to a type of thinking. It's the heart of human wisdom that asks, "How could anyone believe that God would require the blood of His Son as payment for all human sin? How could anyone say that man is by nature sinful and undeserving of God's love - if there is a God?"

R. J. Rushdoony is described as a Calvinist philosopher and theologian. He died in 2001. We would have conflict with features of his theology, but in 1961 he wrote a book entitled "Intellectual Schizophrenia" in which he correctly observed:

Where man asserts his independence of God, saying in effect, that, while he will deny God, he will not deny life, nor its relationships, values, society, its sciences and art, he is involved in contradiction. It is an impossibility for man to deny God and still have law and order, justice, anything, apart from God. The more man and society depart from God, the more they depart from reality, the more they are caught in the net of self-contradiction and self-frustration, the more they are involved in the will to destruction and the love of death. For man to turn his back on God, therefore, is to turn towards death; it involves ultimately the renunciation of every aspect of life.

Babies are murdered. Traditional family values and strong parenting are demonized, and then people wonder why children wonder away. We have become lurid, impolite, self-absorbed and smothered in technological distractions. Vulgarity and violence are highly acceptable and money makers for the entertainment industry. The main issues of our culture are sex, drugs, and death. God spells out the consequences: "For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death." (Prov. 8:35-36) The goodness of what God does is not for the self-glorified.

II. The Unexpected.

There was that moment when the great Old Testament prophet Elijah was sent by God to the home of a widow who lived in Zarephath. After Elijah requested bread and water from her, she stated, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” (1 Kg. 17:12) They were on the verge of starving to death as the result of a severe drought. God worked a miracle through Elijah and provided for them through the entire drought.

Centuries later, Jesus would say of that moment:

“But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.” (Lk. 4:25-26)

Four points are to be noted. First, God sent Elijah “only (only!) to a widow and her son of Zarephath. Second, God miraculously provided what was needed during the drought. Third, the widow and her son did not become wealthy or see themselves worthy and deserving of anything, but were made wealthy in the Love of God. Fourth, the incident would foreshadow the greatness of God’s love for we who would eternally suffer and starve if it were not for God’s love in Christ Who is the Living Water and Bread for eternal life!

The widow of Zarephath is a glorious illustration of what our text proclaims; words that have been echoed here many, many times:

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (vv. 26-30)

It’s about what God does: Calls, as in “consider your calling.” He calls not the worldly wise, but those who see themselves for who they really are: poor, miserable sinners in need of the richness of God’s love in Christ. He calls the unexpected. It’s what the world can’t grasp: “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (v. 25)

III. Called Such As Us.

There was that moment when Jesus spoke a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee was a man of celebrity and influence. He prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” (Lk. 18:11-12) The Pharisee was a world lover. He is a stark example of the works-righteous, the person who thinks God will love him because he’s doing all the right things. And he’s a stark example of the self-righteous who see themselves as a step above others and worthy of God’s love.

Next Jesus turned his attention to the tax collector and said, “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” (Lk. 18:13) The tax collector was nothing but dung in the eyes of most. He’s the one who would confess, “I, a poor miserable sinner confess unto you all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended you and justly deserve your present and eternal punishment.”

The widow of Zarephath and the tax collector are the people God calls to be his: the *foolish*, the *weak*, the *low* and *despised*, the *things that are not*. It's what Jesus said: "Those who are well (the works righteous and the self-righteous; people full of themselves) have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Lk. 5:31-32)

And so, we have to come to terms with ourselves; who we are and what we are before a Holy God. Realistically, we are the widow of Zarephath and the tax collector. And when we come to terms with that, what our text for this morning says speaks of us:

And because of (God) you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God (that is, that we know His love in Christ), righteousness (that is, God reckons us as righteous, obedient through faith in Christ's obedience for us) and sanctification (holiness) and redemption (that is, Christ is the One Who bought us from death and hell and won heaven for us), so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (vv. 30-31)

Isn't that something indescribably wonderful? Christ makes His journey to suffer and die on a vile Roman cross to take a bunch of nothings and make us His forever and ever! It's not about what we did. **It's about what God does. Calls! We - are - His!**

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

Third Sunday of Lent

March 24, 2019

I Corinthians 1:18-31: “It’s About What God Does ... Calls”

I. Not the Self-Glorified.

II. The Unexpected.

III. Called Such As Us.

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