

Becoming Wise

Psalm 19
1 Corinthians 1:18-25

March 4, 2018
Faith Community

The city of Corinth was a big deal in biblical times. It was a major seaport with a population of well over half a million. No other city in Greece, including Athens itself, could rival its strategic importance in commerce, politics and the flow of information.

There were at least twelve different temples in Corinth, including one for Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and in the heart of the city was the Temple of Apollo, the god of the sun.

All that had a dark side to it, as Corinth was also a hotbed of immorality, as you might imagine. At one time the Temple of Aphrodite hosted one thousand sacred prostitutes, if you can imagine such a thing.

Paul had spent a year and a half in Corinth during his second missionary journey, so the church and its people were important to him. Actually, thanks to Paul, we know more about the church in Corinth than any other first century community of faith.

He wrote this letter to the Corinthians at least in part because word had gotten back to him about all kinds of trouble there. Corinth's infamous immorality had worked its way into the church. Factions had developed, with people lining up behind different charismatic leaders who were challenging Paul's integrity and authority. Brothers and sisters in Christ were taking each other to court, false teachings had started to take root, and worship itself was being corrupted.

The church was in bad shape and needed urgent attention. People were basically going through the paces of religion while living like the rest of the world the rest of the time. They were easily impressed and manipulated. There were power struggles. Their level of immaturity was gradually destroying them.

It was time to go back to the basics, so Paul wrote these letters to the church in Corinth. He faced some of the issues head on and then dug a little deeper to the underlying causes.

Here's the bottom line: There is to be something different about a Christ follower, and that difference is so foundational that it covers and colors all of life. It will put you at odds sometimes with the world around you, but ultimately, as Christ becomes alive in you, not only will you grow, but people will be drawn to the Lord that you serve.

If, as Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free," Flannery O'Connor's spin on it is that you will know the truth and the truth will make you odd. There is to be something different about a Christ follower. Here's how Paul put it:

....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, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are. (1 Co. 1:27-8)

There is to be something different about a Christ follower.

I love that Dorothy Sayers line:

"To do them justice, the people who crucified Jesus did not do so because he was a bore. Quite the contrary; he was too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have declawed the lion of Judah and made him a housecat for pale priests and pious old ladies."

Think for a moment how we've done that. We've turned some of the most earth shattering stories ever told into clichés. When it was originally spoken, the parable of the Good Samaritan was nothing short of outrageous. Jews and Samaritans would have nothing to do with each other. There were hard and fast religious laws against it. Today it would be like a grand dragon of the Klan coming to the aid of Bernie Sanders. Talk like that could get you in trouble, as happened with Jesus. He made some powerful people angry with that one. But to those who understood, it was an invitation to new life.

The Prodigal Son trashed all the proper customs of the day, especially with the disgraceful conduct of the father with giving his son his inheritance ahead of time, and then making a fool of himself to welcome him home after he'd made a mess of his life. But to those who understood, it was a masterpiece that described the boundless love of God who would stop at nothing to get his child home.

But you see,

....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. (1 Co. 1:18)

Society was built on power and status concentrated on the male head of the household in wealthy and aristocratic families. Crucifixion was a death fitting for slaves. It was shameful. But the message of the cross is foolishness.....

No wonder we look the other way when Jesus says things like,

Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage. (Matthew 20:26-28, TMSG)

That's not the way to get ahead, is it?

Everything gets turned on its head. It's all different. That's because you and I are to be different. It cannot happen when we spend an hour a week doing this and live like the rest of the world the rest of the time. That takes us right back to Corinth.

So friends, learn what it means to become wise. It's the crock pot of Christianity while the world around you goes for the microwave of typical religion. It's downright foolish in the eyes of the world but, in reality, is nothing less than the power of God. And it will save your life.