

“The Foolishness of God”

“18 For 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. 19 For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

I have been raised in the church and in ministry ever since birth. I was baptized as baby, attended Sunday school and VBS. I took part in confirmation, youth group, and Bible studies. I attended a Lutheran college where I was surrounded by other Christians. I now work in a church and most of my days are spent doing an activity that is ministry related.

I am so thankful for this foundation that has been given to me by my parents and those who have help me grow in my faith along the way, but I do have one complaint. No matter what church or ministry I have been a part of or involved with I have not been able to escape one specific activity.

Tables and Chairs.

My earliest memories of going to church are helping my father set up round and heavy wooden tables. In confirmation we would help set-up and take down the sanctuary with these chairs that had to lock perfectly together. It doesn't matter if I was at a college, working at camp, or volunteering in church, I always know that there will be tables and chairs to set-up or take down. At one point, I told my wife that if I wasn't able to find a position in youth ministry, I would just start a company that rents out tables and chairs because I was an expert by that point.

We have our youth group take down the fellowship hall as a part of youth group and if that's not a selling point to get more kids to church and youth group, I don't know what is. Yet, it is still something that needs to get done. We can't just sit on the floor all the time; we need places to enjoy our coffee and donuts and to host our meetings or studies.

In youth ministry there is this constant drive and expectation to keep your program “cool” and up to date with the constant changes in trends within the culture of younger generations. Because if you keep your youth ministry attractive and current, that will bring in more youth.

Sometimes I feel like I must constantly be searching social media to stay current to understand what my own youth are talking about each week. There is some truth to this and you do not want to become outdated. You want to reach people where they are and speak to them through what they are experiencing.

Paul did this very thing in the book of Acts. In chapter 17 we find Paul in Athens, seeking to share the good news but also distressed by the amount of idols he sees. He notices an inscription on an altar titled “to an unknown God.”

Paul then uses this as a way to reach the people of Athens, because the people who lived there always sought new knowledge and new wisdom. Paul took something they appreciated as a culture and used it to share about the one True God and what Christ had done for them.

The church today as a whole strives to understand, empathize and connect with the current culture to build relationships and bring people to the faith. And while the intentions are pure....to share the Gospel.....we left behind the most important ingredient, the reason we have the good news to share – the cross.

Throughout 2019 there was a myriad of well-known pastors, church leaders and worship leaders who declared that they were “stepping away” from Christianity or that they were leaving church. This is distressing to see and because they were well-known, it was widely broadcasted and recorded. Interviews were done... news articles were written....and it became a public event.

Personally, I do not think this trend is over. I do believe we will see more church leaders step down and do so publicly, which brings forth concerns that if these leaders and pastors are falling away, then what is to stop congregations and larger groups of Christians from doing the same. Why is this happening? Because many Christians have forgotten that the cross is indeed foolish.

The cross is not easily comprehended or understood. The gospel can be shared with someone in two minutes, but if you try to bring reason and perfect understanding to what Jesus has done for us, you will spend a lifetime searching for answers. So instead of trusting in the wisdom of God and His sovereignty to advance the gospel, we find churches, leaders and pastors bringing the gospel down to a human understanding. Our own wisdom, our own discernment, does not bring people to Christ, the cross brings people Christ.

Christianity Today wrote an article back in August titled “Leaving the Faith by losing the focus” in response to the trend of leaders falling away. I encourage you to read the full article as it touches on many viewpoints of the issue. Part of the article reads as follows:

People question everything. But not only that, our culture is one of hyper-individualization and personalization where the individual's needs and desires are prioritized over others. Given this cultural landscape, there's a syncretistic tendency for individuals to craft their own morals, views, and standards to create a worldview and micro-narrative that works for them.

The church is bombarded with these cultural mortars daily. And at the heart, the Christian faith runs counter-culture to many of these environmental mortar shells. And what I think happens is that over time these shells have a tendency to test the faith of Christians by tempting them to take their eyes off Jesus.

For example, my takeaways from Marty Sampson's post were:

Pastors fall

Christians can be the most judgmental people

No one talks about the hard issues of Christianity

The Bible is full of contradictions

How God can be love but then send people to hell

The Christian faith is not for me

Christianity seems to me like any other religion

Question....where's Jesus?

There's something similar with Josh Harris' post. If you read his post in its entirety, there's nothing about Jesus.

On a deeper dive, it seems that the Christian faith—that they once so boldly declared—ceased working for these men. All the reasons why they are leaving the faith or struggling with the faith have little to do with the actual essence of the Christian faith—Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

Without knowing these men, it seems that what transpired—and we will continue to see it in the lives of others as we move further into this century—is that they grew weary trying to understand, interpret, communicate, and explain the infinite through the lens and to the lives of the finite.

And as a result, focusing on the secondary and tertiary issues of the Christian faith allowed their eyes to wander from the author and perfecter of the faith.

Anytime we take our eyes off Jesus during turbulent storms—be that physical, philosophical, practical or emotional storms—we drift away from Jesus. Peter is the poster-child for this.”

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” – Hebrews 12:1-2

One of the greatest threats to the Gospel in our culture today is our attempt to reach the lost through unique and new ways instead of simply being vessels of Christ’s words.

22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

The world will demand that we as church act a certain way so that the Gospel becomes understandable and acceptable. But the moment we twist the cross into the shape that the world desires, it no longer becomes a cross but block of wood to stumble upon.

And I love how Paul ends this passage! *Verse 25: “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”* We know it to be true that God is not foolish, we have thousands of examples that God is not weak. But there are people who would say these words, who question God and his ways. Even if someone could prove God to be foolish or weak it wouldn’t matter and it wouldn’t take away from the power of the cross. Because the wisest teacher couldn’t last a moment in the presence of God’s wisdom, and the strongest mind is like a foundation of sand compared to the foundation that God has set.

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world.

To us, as Christians, these words do bring hope and encouragement. If the cross is foolish in the eyes of the world, sign me up! Because my hope and future rely on Jesus who is infinite and not the plans or thoughts of the world which is finite. But my friends, we cannot just sit back on this comforting truth. We do not simply proclaim to know what is right, but we are called to boast that the Cross is the reason for our hope and our salvation.

It is the cross that gives us endurance to finish the race, and it is the cross that we kneel at in search of forgiveness and grace. Let us invite our friends, our family, and the unaware to kneel with us. For while the cross is foolish to those who have not heard it, it is even more foolish to hold these words in our heart and not share them.

30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”