

Lectionary A September 14, 2014 Holy Cross Sunday
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN

Scripture:

Numbers 21:4b-9

Psalm 78:1-2, 34-38

1 Corinthians 1:18-24

John 3:13-17

The Foolish Cross

When I read these scripture texts for today, Holy Cross Sunday, I see a huge contrast. Right away with the first verse of the Old Testament reading, I see impatient, self-consumed, whining, lying people. Our Numbers text opens with, *“But the people became impatient on the way.”* And Psalm 78 describes the people of God as liars. The Message Bible says, *“they lied through their teeth the whole time.”* And in the New Testament passage, things haven’t changed much as far as human beings are concerned. Paul is scolding the people of Corinth because they think they know it all. They have decided that their wisdom superior to God’s “foolishness.”

In contrast to a miserable bunch of humans, I see something else. I see God who is loving and caring. Psalm 78:38 describes God. *“Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; often he restrained his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath.”* This contrast has existed since the day God breathed breath into the first human. And what’s amazing to me is we humans are still here.

We, the humans that are here today, can’t really point fingers at those Israelites or the Corinthians, because, think about it—we’d probably react the same way in their circumstances. Come on, I know I don’t like eating the same thing two meals in a row—let alone forty years! Would I complain? Well, Yeah. And in the Corinthians case, aren’t humans always trying to figure God out? Don’t we take for granted that God sees things the way we do? When God doesn’t, we argue. We fight. We still try to make things fit in a nice neat human box that makes sense to us.

And what does God do about this? God sends Jesus into the world to stir things up even more. And that is why, today, we focus on God’s ultimate act of foolishness according to human standards—the cross.

Today, we are calling the cross holy. And we are so used to calling it holy and precious and beautiful, that we don’t even realize how absurd that is. The cross, our symbol of Christian hope, is an instrument of execution used to killed insurgents, rebels, those who purposely made havoc with the laws of society. It is like having a guillotine, or an electric chair, or a lynching tree hanging up there on our wall. Not a pretty sight for the early Christians. In fact it had to bring them fear. Many of them were facing the same fate on their own crucifix.

Think about it. Look at the people God chose throughout our history. The Israelites who God chose to be God's own people complained about the food. They said one thing and meant another, they –they had it coming, don't you think? Let 'em get devoured by snakes.

But wait. Before we get too carried away judging the Israelites, and for that matter, in the case of our New Testament text, the people of Corinth, let's step back a moment and think. So what's so different about those guys and us? All we have to do is look at the news and we see that when it comes to human beings, we haven't changed. Yet, our Gospel Lesson from John tells us that God chose us. **We** are chosen to receive God's ultimate gift, everlasting life. That in itself sounds pretty foolish, don't you think?

If we read a little farther in our 1 Corinthians text we read about God strategy for the choices made. Starting at verse 27 we read, *"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, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are..."* What's it talking about here? Is it talking about God's choice of clumsy, ignorant humans, or is it talking about God's choice of the cross? Neither one makes sense in my mind.

That's the point. God's choice of foolish people and the foolish cross totally disrupt the logic of the world in order to merge the two choices together, us and the cross, so that both choices point to who God is. God chose foolishness to bring peace.

Ephesians chapter 2 tells us, *"Christ brought us together through his death on the cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father."*

God chooses the foolish/weak/nothing not just in order to upend the status quo *but also* in order to create life. *"[God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus,"* Paul says (1 Corinthians 1:30), and then he describes the life just what that life is like. *"Everything that we have—right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start—comes from God by way of Jesus Christ."*

That is what makes the cross holy. That is what makes it a beautiful symbol of hope for us. That is why we wear crosses around our necks. God's love for us through Jesus' suffering and death and resurrection gives us hope that no matter how bad we botch things, the cross is there to devour our sin and point us the way to something more beautiful than we can imagine.

Just this week, one of you emailed me a question. "How can we be RIC, how can we say we welcome everyone when we like to choose our friends?" Yes, how can anyone say we welcome everyone when we are critical of each other? Sounds foolish doesn't it?

Being a Reconciling in Christ church isn't about who we are. It is about who God is. It is about Jesus on the cross. It is about the foolishness of Jesus' love for us and our response to it. That is what takes us out of our comfort zone to embrace everyone. *"For God so loved the world that he*

gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." Praise God for this foolishness.

It is under the foolishness of the cross that we find hope. We find hope in a world scourged with violence. Under the cross there is hope for people who are violated because of religion, the color of their skin, their sex, their orientation or identity, their education, and their lack of resources to survive. There is hope for people like Michael Brown, the reporters beheaded in the Iraq, the children abused, neglected, even killed by their own parents. That cross on our wall—that instrument of execution has killed something all right. Death.

You know when you think about it, God could have chosen to wipe us out a long time ago. That would have made more sense. God could have chosen wrath. And when you get down to it that is exactly what God did. God poured out divine anger on the one on the cross, who was made sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) *in order that all sinners for all times do not have to take the punishment of their sins.* Now we always have hope of forgiveness, of starting all over again, of new life.

When we pray this week, we can thank God for the foolishness of the cross and ask God to help those who seek the hope it gives. Bring your cards up and put them in the basket as you come to the Table for Communion.

Let us look to this cross today with an awestruck appreciation for God's foolish choice that defeats death so we live in the glorious hope. That cross in its absurd foolishness shows that God's love is bigger than any evil we could encounter and we are covered with God's saving love forever. That is what the cross means to me. Amen.