

Sunday March 8, 2015

In the reading from 1 Corinthians this morning Paul brings forth the message of Christ's crucifixion in terms of wisdom. God has turned the wisdom of the world, the wisdom pursued by the scribes, into folly because the wisdom they pursued did not enable them to know God and to understand the significance of the cross. For the Greeks who were seeking philosophy and mysteries and for those Jews who were seeking messianic signs and miracles, the proclamation of Christ crucified was a scandal. But for those who are called, the so called wisdom of the age is set aside and superseded by Jesus, who is God's power and God's wisdom.

1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

¹⁸The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hell bent on destruction, but for those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out. ¹⁹It's written, I'll turn conventional wisdom on its head, I'll expose so-called experts as crackpots. ²⁰So where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn't God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense? ²¹Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb—preaching, of all things!—to bring those who trust him into the way of salvation. ²²While Jews clamor for miraculous demonstrations and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom, ²³we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified. Jews treat this like an anti-miracle—and Greeks pass it off as absurd. ²⁴But to us who are personally called by God himself—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God's ultimate miracle and wisdom all wrapped up in one. ²⁵Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can't begin to compete with God's "weakness."

The reading from John this morning is the first of at least three Passovers we find in John's Gospel. The only Passover mentioned in the other Gospels is the one at which Jesus dies. The description of Jesus driving the people out of the temple begins much like the same story in the other Gospels, although there are slight differences in the details. John's moving of the event from the end of the Gospel to the beginning of the Gospel fits with John's tendency to set at the beginning those stories and events that the other Gospels have later in the story.

In this story Jesus comes to the Temple of Jerusalem, the very heart of the Israelite nation and religion, at the outset of his ministry and confronts its authorities. Their hostility to Jesus is foreshadowed and his own death and resurrection are revealed.

John 2: 13-22

¹³When the Passover Feast, celebrated each spring by the Jews, was about to take place, Jesus traveled up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴He found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves. The loan sharks were also there in full strength. ¹⁵Jesus put together a whip out of strips of leather and chased them out of the Temple, stampeding the sheep and cattle, upending the tables of the loan sharks, spilling coins left and right. ¹⁶He told the dove merchants, “Get your things out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a shopping mall!” ¹⁷That’s when his disciples remembered the Scripture, “Zeal for your house consumes me.” ¹⁸But the Jews were upset. They asked, “What credentials can you present to justify this?” ¹⁹Jesus answered, “Tear down this Temple and in three days I’ll put it back together.” ²⁰They were indignant: “It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you’re going to rebuild it in three days?” ²¹But Jesus was talking about his body as the Temple. ²²Later, after he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this. They then put two and two together and believed both what was written in Scripture and what Jesus had said.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon – “This is just crazy!”

Throughout the season of Lent we are asking ourselves the question; “Where do we find God?” This comes from the reading from Joel that was used on Ash Wednesday, when in that particular reading the people were challenged with the statement; “Where is your God?” Now this is a question that many of us have asked throughout the course of our life. Last week we talked about our identity and how many times we impose identities on other people, sometimes in doing that we also use those identities to give those specific individuals less of a voice in our world. We also forget that in doing so we ignore one of the most important identities, and that is our identity as being of God.

Today's reading from John that tells the story of the "cleansing of the temple" brings us to another question about where we might find God. This story shows up in all of the Gospels, but John has positioned this particular story at the beginning of his Gospel, whereas the other three Gospels find the story just prior to the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Within the context of the times, what was happening in the temple?

This was Passover and it was a place of gathering, Dan Clendenin, formerly with the Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship at Stanford University, describes what was happening at the temple in this way; "As an observant Jew, Jesus would have joined the 300,000 people who had crammed into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. At this time, the temple building constituted the essence of Jewish faith in both literal and symbolic ways. It was a bustling nexus of commercial activity, crowds of worshippers, nationalist aspirations, political identity, historical memory, architectural splendor, and of religious affiliation."

In the midst of all of this there sat those who were selling animals to the pilgrims, who needed to make their required sacrifices to God. Those selling these animals were also taking advantage of these travelers, as many could not bring sacrifices with them while they travelled and so they had no choice but to purchase a sacrifice in the temple, as those in power at the temple insisted that God needed, no demanded a sacrifice from those who had come for Passover. In the temple courtyard we also have the money changers, who would be there to provide exchange of Roman currency into Jewish money, so that these same worshippers could pay their temple taxes in the currency that was accepted by the temple authorities.

We have, in a rather delicate way, named what happens next as the "cleansing of the temple" when in fact it seems that this is the only real violent act that is taken by Jesus in any of the Gospel stories. This was an act that seems so totally out of character with what we understand of Jesus. After this event I can only imagine his disciples tossing and turning through a sleepless night trying to figure out all this craziness. They must have wondered what was going on after seeing Jesus, angry, wielding a whip, tossing furniture, and shouting. I wonder if they questioned what was going on and if they had made a mistake in following this person.

This reminds me of the movie Evan Almighty. How many have seen that movie? This is a sequel to the movie Bruce Almighty in which Jim Carrey complains about God one to many times and is given almighty powers, takes God place and

realizes how difficult it is to be God. In movie *Evan Almighty*, Steve Carrell reprises his role as Evan Baxter, but in this movie he has just won an election and becomes a freshman Congressman and so he moves his family down to Washington D.C. God contacts Evan and tells him to build an ark in preparation for a great flood. Even eventually even begins to look like what we would picture a historical Noah to look like, long beard, and a robe made of what looked like a very rough fabric. This leads many who know Evan to begin to question his sanity, even his wife who eventually left him, taking their sons with her. As the movie progresses Evan seems to become even more unhinged, at least in the eyes of his family, friends, and co-workers, but Evan continues on with what God has asked of him, not that he really had much of choice. There is one scene in the movie where Evan shaves off his beard and is clean-shaven, he turns around and looks in the mirror and he has a full beard again. Another time Evan changes from the robe to a suit, walks out the door, only to find himself wearing the robe again. Eventually in the movie, there is a flood, although not in a way we might imagine. Instead of rain for 40 days and 40 nights that floods the whole land, we have a dam, that was built through bribes, and shoddy workmanship, a dam that made some people rich, while not really helping anyone else, burst and sent a wall of water down the valley. This movie can then become a commentary on how many see the world of politics working and this one individual who did not follow the status quo, this one individual who said that there needed to be a different way.

This brings us back to the story of Jesus in the temple. There is chaos and confusion and what we think is turned upside down. What is interesting is that John places this story at the beginning of the Gospel, while the other writers have placed it at the end.

For John this story then becomes something that foreshadows what is to come, because really what did Jesus do but bring chaos and confusion in regards to the way things had always been. We also live in lives that can be full of chaos and confusion and how often do we not look for God in the midst of chaos and confusion.

When we were looking at images for this season of Lent that might go with our theme of "Where do you find God?" Laura suggested that we might want to use the poem *Footprints*. Now many of us know this poem. A man has a dream and in that dream he looks back over his life as footprints in sand on a beach, but at certain times in his life, he notices only one set of prints. He questions God about this and God responds. I ran across this other comic strip that I found quite funny, but also spoke to me about the idea of chaos and confusion in my life.....

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians he talks about turning conventional wisdom on its head and I wonder if this is what we must also do. Are we being called, in those times of chaos and confusion to know that God is with us? Are we to remember like the dreamer in the poem that when we are in times of struggle and stress, it can be God who is carries us? When we feel totally lost and alone, can we be in that sand hole, knowing that God will be there from getting a hot dog? Those times of struggle are the times that we can seem to lose sight of God, but this story tells us that sometimes in the midst of the chaos, in the midst of the confusion, those times when we are caught so off guard, that we really don't know what is happening, that God is with us. As Paul states our wisdom is ours, it is not God's and we need to know that as Christians we are journeying through this thing called life with a God who is there with us through it all. Evan Baxter in the movie continued on even though he was confused and really did not know where he was going, or what would happen and yet he trusted in God enough to know that God was with him. Where do we find God? Even in the midst of all life has to throw at us we need to know that God is with us, God is there, we are never alone. Let us remember our New Creed, which begins with "We live in God's world." We do live in God's world and God is with us. We do not have to face those times of confusion, chaos, and stress alone, God is with us. Amen.