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SA Lenten Devotions 2018 "The 'Foolishness' of God" Week 2

Sam Sessa

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, sessas@csl.edu

Andrew Belt

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, belta@csl.edu

Jeremiah Jording

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, jordingj@csl.edu

Jaron Melin

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, melinj@csl.edu

Noah Kegley

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, kegleyn@csl.edu

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LEN^T**JEN**
DEVOTIONS

THE
Fool
THE
Beloved

A CONCORDIA SEMINARY
STUDENT COLLABORATION
LENT 2018

The “Foolishness” of God

Week 2

During this second week we take a look at “The Foolishness of God.” At times the ways we see God at work in the Scriptures and the world appear to be counterproductive, even foolish. He promises cleansing through a simple bath, by the word of an old man of God. Can’t He instead make a spectacular show to demonstrate His power? He promises offspring to an old man and an old woman past the age of childbearing, and takes more than two decades to keep that promise. “What a laugh!” we might think. He tells a story of a vineyard owner with violent and murderous tendencies. What person in his right mind would send his son after the abuse and death his servants received at their hands? But it is against all such questions the words of Paul remind us that God’s foolishness is wiser than man’s wisdom. God, like an extravagantly generous farmer, sows His Word without prejudice or precondition, even to those who cannot and will not accept it. What seems like foolish waste to us is actually abundant grace. The fact of the matter is that God makes His kingdom grow, God follows through on all His promises, no matter how outlandish they may seem at first, second, or even fiftieth glance. God accomplishes His aim through weakness, humility, and foolishness. If God’s weakness demonstrates so much power, and His foolishness is pregnant with such great wisdom, how shall we who can scarcely begin to grasp at His purposes draw near to behold Him in all His glory? May we approach in humility, with fear and trembling, to take refuge in His abundant grace!

The "Foolishness" of God

Monday

February 19, 2018

Seminarian Sam Sessa, 4th Year

Based on 2 Kings 5:10-12

In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth. He created the universe and everything inside of it. The psalmist describes the heavens as the works of God's finger tips. The moon and stars are dainty lights that God has set in place. Thus it may be no surprise that Naaman, a great general and a significant man, expected a little more from Elisha.

Naaman was afflicted with leprosy, a death sentence that would be suffered in exile and ignominy. He went looking for a wizard, and he expected smoke and flashes of lightning, clear signs of the healing power of magic. What he found was an old man, living in a small house, bereft of royalty or glamor. And what he received was not a magic potion or incantation, but simple words.

We may forgive Naaman for having the ignorance of a pagan, but we have no such crutch. We know the almighty power of YHWH, we know that Jesus has conquered death and the grave, we know the God whom we serve. We also know how dangerous our Enemy is. Yet, God hasn't armed us with lightning or a magic sword but has given us only simple words. As Paul said:

"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. It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." (1 Cor. 1:18,20b)

Naaman was saved through the Word applied to water. We are armed with everything we need to combat the Enemy, to rob the grave, and to vanquish death. We are armed with simple words. How exceedingly foolish.

The "Foolishness" of God

Tuesday

February 20, 2018

Seminarian Andrew Belt, 4th Year

Based on Genesis 18:10-12

Our text for devotion today leaves us without doubt that Abraham and Sarah are beyond the capability of having children. We are told that they "were old," and "advanced in years." And even more to the point, "The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah." Kids are not a possibility here. So to Sarah, listening in, God just must seem to be out of touch with how things work. She is 90 years old! This promise seems too good to be true. In fact, it just seems foolish.

The promises that God makes still seem foolish at times. When Paul stood before Agrippa and Festus in Acts 26 and proclaimed the faith, Festus told Paul, "You are out of your mind!" At times, we might even think so as well. A man from my vicarage church is days if not hours away from death. A friend of mine has a two-year-old child who needs a heart transplant sooner rather than later. And in these moments, we are left wondering if God's promise of life and salvation just seems too good to be true. Sarah laughs incredulously, and we join with her.

But God's "foolishness" is our salvation. In what we perceive as weakness and even defeat, God works His plan. Through a "worn out" old woman He provides the promised heir. Through a young virgin He will provide the ultimate promised son of Abraham. At the cross, in weakness and defeat, God casts down the mighty from their thrones, humbles the wise, and raises up the humble. The fact remains that God has made a promise the He will keep and we grasp it by faith. Faith which Luther calls, "a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times." This foolishness is God's salvation through Christ our Lord, freely given, never earned. Why believe this "foolishness?" Because it is this foolishness that will have Sarah hold onto her son, Isaac, whose name means laughter. It is this foolishness that reminds us that no matter the situation in life, God will keep his promise. The dead will rise and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

The “Foolishness” of God

Wednesday

February 21, 2018

Seminarian Jeremiah Jording, 4th Year

Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ –Luke 20:13

It is easy to be mad at the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Jews who compelled Pilate to convict Christ to death. How dare they reject the cornerstone? How dare they kill God’s own Son? Their eyes should have seen Jesus for who he is, their God and Lord. Their actions are so repugnant to our sensibilities we may be tempted into saying, “I would not have yelled, ‘crucify him.’ I would have stood up for my Lord.”

Would you? If you were in their shoes you would see Jesus as someone attempting to take away everything that belongs to you, your place, power, and way of life. Jesus in Luke 10 tells a parable of how the people had been watching over the vineyard, but sadly they were convinced it belonged to them rather than to its true owner who had entrusted it to their care. When the true owner sent his Son, they would not let him take back what they came to believe was theirs. It was wise in their eyes to protect what they believed was their own.

A friend of mine in the middle of Iowa gestured to the rolling corn fields that surrounded his home and he said, “I’m just looking over this land for a little while.” I was confused because as far as I knew he owned all the land, many acres. He saw my perplexed expression and said, “Don’t you know that this land belongs to my master? I am just here as a temporary steward.” Then it dawned on me that the land surrounding us was indeed borrowed land that God had entrusted to him. At first I thought he was being foolish, but the truth was that he had considerable wisdom.

How often do we forget that all we have received, our homes, our families, and our vocations do not belong to us? This Lenten season let us meditate on how God has given us everything, including his Son. How extraordinary it is that even after the wicked tenants rejected three of the master’s servants, the loving master was still willing to send His Son to them. Even as the master’s Son hung on the cross, He cried out “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

To believe that anything we have belongs to us is worldly wisdom. Let us instead embrace God’s foolishness.

The “Foolishness” of God

Thursday

February 22, 2018

Seminarian Jaron Melin, 1st Year

Based on 1 Corinthians 1:25-31

How did you choose your Valentine? Is your Valentine smart, strong, and good-looking? Are you? Would you choose a fool? Are you a fool? Are you worthy to be a Valentine? Are you worthy to be loved?

We tend to seek worthy Valentines and to be worthy as well. We love because of worthy qualities and similarities. We are not worthy though; we are fools. However, God chooses to love us fools. Why would God love fools? He must be foolish! However, “[...] the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:25, ESV). God chooses fools to be His people. Why? To shame the worthy using the unworthy (v.27)! To take anything which seems like something in the world and to bring it to nothing (v.28)! Why? Because He truly is wiser and stronger, for He can accomplish anything even through fools and weaklings. Therefore, we cannot boast before God (v.29).

So then, where do we find worthiness? As we are humbled, we then see Jesus. He is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption (v.30). Before the cross, we are brought to nothing and then given everything. Through Jesus, we are made worthy. Luther says it well:

The love of God does not find, but works, in us what is worthy of being loved; the love of man springs from something which a person regards as worth loving (Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 28).

He does not love us because we are worthy, but rather we are worthy because we are loved by Him. With His love in us, we may then extend His foolishness to the world by loving the unlovable.

The “Foolishness” of God

Friday

February 23, 2018

Seminarian Noah Kegley, 4th Year

Based on Mark 4:1-20

One of the themes in the Gospel of Mark is *the kingdom of God*. The kingdom of God can appear to be foolish, at least in this text and the verses surrounding it because God is the only one who can make it grow. The gospel story demonstrates how this theme is played out. At the beginning of the Gospel Jesus says to “repent and believe in the gospel.” In Mark 4 Jesus is preaching alongside the Sea of Galilee about the kingdom of God. Jesus tells the parable of the sower to show that some people will hear the Word of God and repent and believe in the gospel. Some however--those who fall into the hands of Satan, turn away as a result of temptation, or chase after riches--will fall away. His words are a reminder that some will hear the Word of God and the Word of God will grow. Others will hear the Word of God and will fall away. Even though the sower goes out to sow seeds, some will fall away. It seems foolish.

As we journey through Lent, we remember our need for the seed to be continually sown in our lives. We must always be reminded that the life of a Christian is a life of repentance. We turn to God in all of our needs. We pray that the Lord would keep us steadfast in his word. We pray that we will not fall into temptation and that the superficial cares of this world will not become our idol. God does his work of bringing us and keeping us in His kingdom through sowers of his word. There isn't a day when we don't need it. Our lives depend on it! His Word convicts us of our sin and reminds us of our need for a Savior. But His Word is also that which makes us alive as forgiven children of His kingdom.