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SA Lenten Devotions 2018 "The Foolishness of the Cross" Week 3

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LENJEN
DEVOTIONS

THE
Fool
THE
Beloved

A CONCORDIA SEMINARY
STUDENT COLLABORATION
LENT 2018

The Foolishness of the Cross

Week 3

Thank you for continuing to join us on our Lenten journey. This week we consider the “foolishness of the cross” from several vantage points. May your appreciation of God’s power in weakness grow as you meditate on the wondrous and mysterious ways that He works to draw us to our Lord.

The Foolishness of the Cross

Monday

February 26, 2018

Seminarian Hayden Lukas, 1st Year

Based on Philippians 2:8

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. —Philippians 2:8

God gives us glimpses of his power throughout the Bible. We see the Pillar of fire and cloud in the desert. God talks to Moses on Mount Sinai. He controls the world from his holy court in Job, his train fills his temple before Isaiah, and his ornate throne room is revealed to John in his Apocalypse.

These give us a rather towering—even terrifying—picture of God. His strength is nothing to be messed with. Are you before a burning bush? You'd better take off your sandals. Are you before the Ark of the Covenant? You'd better not get too close. Do you have unclean lips in the presence of the Lord? You'd better hope there is a coal nearby.

But what happens when the fullness of time comes? God's glory is about to be made manifest, and what do we see? With all of Israel watching, what are we going to get? A thicker cloud? A bigger throne? A brighter bush? Maybe a powerful general?—Seeing that guy who can make it rain sulfur would be cool.

But we don't get any of these. We get...a *baby*? We get a guy persecuted by his own *countrymen*? We get a guy eating with *sinner*s? That guy who just got *arrested*?

Paul's answer is "yes—and we even get a man on a cross." God could flex his glory muscles. He could trounce the devil and the world; He could win this world back. And He does. But he does it on a cross. A stumbling block to some. To some, it is the power of God. One thing is for sure: the weakness of God is stronger than the power of men. And that is why Christ's name is exalted above every name.

The Foolishness of the Cross

Tuesday

February 27, 2018

Seminarian Jarod Koenig, 4th Year

Based on 1 Corinthians 1:23

“We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness”

The text for today deserves to be read and re-read in its context multiple times, allowing Paul’s message to sink deep into our being. We post-Easter Christians tend to quickly glaze over a phrase such as “Christ crucified,” calling it obvious and ordinary. Jesus is God. Christ was crucified. We proclaim him. Nothing crazy, strange, or foolish here.

What we fail to recognize is the seemingly antithetical and ridiculous nature of the phrase “Christ Crucified.” Christ, the anointed One, the Son of David, the King who will rule the house of David forever, labeled as one who was beaten, shamed, mocked, and executed on a Roman torture device. Yes, the message of Christ is certainly one which was a stumbling block to Jews, since it turned their beliefs upside down, and foolishness to Greeks, who, in their unending pursuit of wisdom could never believe that a common, crucified criminal would simultaneously be the savior of the world.

However, this paradoxical message is the one we still proclaim. Christ is both the eternal king of the world, and yet rules bearing the marks of the crucifixion. The ways of God are not the ways of this world, and God has demonstrated his power to us in the form of weakness. As we continue our Lenten journey, may we ever hold fast to the one who still comes to us in weakness – in the form of a small sliver of bread, a sample of wine, a few drops of water, or a simple speech act– in these things, our God has shown us his great power. In these acts of weakness, the Crucified One forgives, loves, saves, and offers life eternal.

The Foolishness of the Cross

Wednesday

February 28, 2018

Seminarian Daniel Clemens, 4th Year

Based on Mark 15:29-32

Read Mark 15:29-32 *silently*. What sort of picture does your mind paint of this scene? When you imagine this part of the crucifixion scene, what draws your attention? Where is your focus? Is it on the passersby? The chief priests? The scribes? The two men who were crucified with Jesus?

Now read it again *aloud*. But *only read the dialogue and all of 15:32*. Now—and bear with me here—what do you *feel* when you read the dialogue in these four verses?

Growing up, perhaps you heard this story from a Sunday school teacher. And those who deride, mock, and revile Jesus were portrayed as antagonists—as villains: “These are the bad guys! Don’t be like them! We don’t like them!”

To this day, when we hear of how our Lord was treated, we feel hurt and anger and hate. And, ironically, we deride, mock, and revile those who derided, mocked, and reviled Jesus on that first Good Friday. And, if we are honest with ourselves, this is how we approach similar situations in our everyday lives. I don’t know about you, but when I hear others mock or insult Jesus and his kingdom, my gut reaction is to harbor hurt, anger, or hatred and to deride, mock, and revile such people. In our attempts to follow Jesus to his cross, sometimes we do not know what we are doing.

But Jesus, who sees that his onlookers are clueless as to his true identity and purpose, harbors not hurt nor anger nor hatred. No, he *loves* them. He pities them because of their tragic misunderstanding. And he asks the Father to forgive them.

Lent is a season of repentance. Throughout this season, you will hear others deride, mock, and revile Jesus. And when you do, love them. Have mercy upon them. Pray that God would grant them a repentant heart and forgive them. And if, in your weakness, you deride, mock, or revile, pray that God would continue to grant you a repentant heart, too.

The Foolishness of the Cross

Thursday

March 1, 2018

Seminarian Joel Newton, 4th Year

Based on John 12:32-33

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”
He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

It’s easy for me to think that because I’m a Christian I deserve a relatively comfortable life. Of course, I would never come right out and say that, but my actions and my assumptions communicate it sometimes. Maybe like me, you don’t have huge aspirations of fame and wealth, but in the back of your mind the thought pops its way up from time to time that you shouldn’t be at a disadvantage in life just because you’re a Christian. Jesus’ words here remind us to expect the opposite.

In this text, Jesus clearly shows us the kind of “glory” that is ours as we follow him all the way. Jesus submitted himself fully to His Father’s will for our sake and our eternal wellbeing. Good or ill, in good times or in bad, our lives are shaped and anchored in our Lord’s life and His cross.

We followers of Christ should expect difficulty and hardship on account of him. We share in Christ’s victory by sharing in his death, we see his power made perfect in weakness, and we’ve been brought back to our Father only because Christ became an orphan for us. Why should we expect treatment any better than what our Leader experienced?

At least for me, the toughest struggle with the foolishness of the cross is comprehending that I’m called to give up comforts for his sake. It can seem foolish not to spend a lifetime on earth achieving my goals of comfort—a good-sized house on a little land, a 1966 F150, enough money to retire and live well, and a generally stress-free life. That’s not what I’m to be about, though. Each of us, having been drawn to saving faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection, are to join in his mission of sacrifice for a hurting world.

“When lures of easy gain with promise brightly shine, Lord, help us seek your kingdom first; our wills with yours align.” Amen

The Foolishness of the Cross

Friday

March 2, 2018

Seminarian Joshua Ulm, 4th Year

Based on Galatians 6:14

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Galatians 6:14

We live in a culture of boasting. We boast to our friends and family at dinners and reunions, to our acquaintances on Facebook and Instagram, to our fellow classmates, our colleagues, and our coworkers. As we boast, we do so selectively. Social media is full of images of smiling children and made-up faces, the long nights full of crying and days with unmasked facial imperfections hidden away. When a student looks at a grade, she may leave her “A” paper on the desk for classmates to see while another student hurriedly shoves his “C” paper into his bag. We boast, but we are careful to choose the best things to boast about.

The object of Paul’s boasting comes as a surprise to our modern world (and surely did to Paul’s hearers as well). The cross of Christ. The criminal’s tree. The sort of place you would only find the worst of the worst, hung for all to see. Only a fool would boast in something like a cross. But Paul understands what the cross means for himself and for you. Connected to His cross in baptism, the world is dead to you and you to it. Sin has no hold on you, the law has no curse for you, death cannot conquer you. Christ is your reality. Christ is your hope. Christ is your life.

It would seem foolish to boast in the cross of Christ. Many in the world *do* think that you are foolish because you believe in the crucified one. But take heart, for in this cross you have been redeemed. Remember the words spoken at your baptism “Receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.” Your relationship to the world is changed. It is dead to you and you to it. You are redeemed and set free by the work of Jesus. Even your actions in the world take on new meaning, focused entirely on your neighbor rather than enslaved to the demands of the law or the selfishness of your heart. You are dead to the world and alive to God in Christ Jesus your Lord. Messy as it is, foolish as it may seem, the object of your boasting is the same as Paul’s- the foolish cross of Christ.

The Foolishness of the Cross

“In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o’er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.”