

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Sunday, January 29, 2017

Not about wise sounding speech

1. John Stott was a great hero of mine. He was, first and foremost, a pastor and preacher. He also wrote many books and was very active in missions and social action. His ministry was profound and touched millions of lives.
 - a. He was also incredibly dry and not at all exciting to listen to. When I was in seminary he came to speak and I remember he being slow, deliberate, and academic.
2. RC Sproul is another of my heroes. He has written dozens of books; he runs a global ministry dedicated to bringing the message of the gospel to everyone; and he is also from Pittsburgh.
 - a. RC Sproul has a bit of a lisp and speaks with one of the worst English dialects known- Pittsburghese. His sermon and teaching delivery is not nearly as polished as some other big names, though that says nothing of the content which is top notch.
3. Neither Stott nor Sproul would ever be awarded style points. There are some great preachers out there who have both style and substance, and there are many more who have only style. Being a great, polished speaker might grow a church; it might build a following for a pastor; but that is all it would ever do if there is no substance.
4. In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul is dealing with the struggles of dealing with heavenly matters in a world dominated by earthly concerns. Prior to our reading for today, Paul was addressing division based on people following one apostle or preacher over another. That is earthly-mindedness that divides the body.
5. Now in this passage he is continuing that train of thought by talking about the concerns of chasing earthly wisdom and power and thus missing the wisdom and power of God. We certainly see this even today. For example, there is a reason why people use high rhetoric and work to be polished speakers. When someone has a good presence, we find ourselves more inclined to believe them.
 - a. Thankfully, God uses that which is foolishness in this world. God uses a dry old Englishman who sounds like he is reading his sermon. God uses a lippy Pittsburgher with poor pronunciation. God uses those whom we would probably never choose ourselves. Because the wisdom of God is different from the wisdom of the world.

Not about the power or wisdom of the world

1. Not only does God use people whom the world probably wouldn't choose; he also chooses to use means which the world wouldn't use. Religions are full of rules. People want to know what they need to do in order to satisfy their god/God. Obey x/y/z. Give so much to the poor. Pray so many times a day. Observe these holy days. Make these sacrifices to these gods at these times of year. These are the wisdom of the world. This is religion of the world.
2. God calls us to something so much more. He doesn't just call us to obey some rituals and sacrifices. He doesn't just call us to pray and give to the poor. He calls us to moral perfection. He calls us to be the perfect and complete reflection of his image.

3. But he also recognizes the weakness within us that doesn't allow us to satisfy those demands. So he again defies the wisdom of the world by sending his own Son to die as a sacrifice for us so that we, in him, would become everything which on our we cannot.
4. ³⁰And 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."
5. What God gave us in Jesus is a free gift. He became everything we needed him to be on our behalf. And it is free. We don't buy it. We don't earn it. And this is blasphemy according to the wisdom of the world.
6. According to the wisdom of the world, we must each make our own way. We must each work to please God on our own. We can't accept the free gift. That is why Purgatory is so appealing to Christians. It allows us the free gift from God, but also allows us to hold on to that worldly wisdom that says we have to pay for ourselves.
7. According to the wisdom of the world, if God were to come to earth, he would be beautiful, mighty, and fearsome. He would crush his enemies and gather his followers (who have pleased him of their own accord). He would never accept insult. He would never humble himself to the point of humiliation. Muslims deny the incarnation because they don't believe God would ever stoop so low as to use the bathroom. Most of all, God would never die- especially at the hands of the very people he came to save.
8. The wisdom of the world can't accept the things of God; and the things of God are foolishness to the world.

God's wisdom and strength

1. We should consider ourselves lucky that God does things according to his wisdom and not ours. We would fail at our religion based on the standards we would set up for ourselves. We simply aren't as able to be righteous as we give ourselves credit for. Likewise, we would reject the free gift because we feel we must pay our own way, and thus, we would willingly perish instead of accepting God's plan.
2. This is why the wisdom of his plan is that he is the one who calls and sets us aside, so that, according to his wisdom and power, some would indeed accept the free gift and find the wisdom of his ways.
 - a. 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.
3. That last line is so powerful. The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. That is why God can use what is anathema- the crucifixion of his own Son- to save the world. Because even the most foolish thing God could ever do is wiser than anything we could devise.
4. Don't be fooled by the wisdom of the world, the golden tongued orator, or the man-made structures of religion. Instead, become a fool for Christ, trusting in the wisdom of God and his power to save.