

THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS

(1 Corinthians 1.18-31 and John 19.1-16)

Introduction

Today – we are reflecting on the fact that God’s wisdom is very different from human wisdom and that Jesus dying on the cross for us was in God’s perfect plan.

In our passage from 1 Corinthians we will be seeing what St Paul taught:

- About God
- The Jews and Greeks who were outside the church
- The Corinthians who were believers

We will be thinking through what are the encouragements and challenges for us today.

1. God

In 1 Corinthians verse 19 we heard the quote from the prophet Isaiah: The prophet Isaiah also wrote – Isaiah 55v8.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways.”

It can be fun at times to use our imagination. I would like us to imagine that we were to travel back in time in a time machine about 10,000 years – certainly well before the time of Abraham and we were asked to use our collective wisdom to develop a salvation plan for God to use to save mankind. There would be many possible answers but I think that we can be absolutely sure that any plan that we would have devised would not have included God’s son being born to a virgin, living the humble life of a carpenter, dying on the cross like a criminal and rising from the dead.

And that being the way of salvation for those who believed. Equally we would have not planned that such amazing good news would be spread by a group of minimally educated fishermen. However this was God's wisdom. And a Great Surprise.

In our passage today we heard:

V 18 - The message of the cross for those of us who are being saved is the POWER of God

V20- has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world

V21- God used the "foolishness" of what was preached to save those who believe.

V25- for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

In our Gospel reading- Jesus before Pilate- we saw his wisdom- knowing when to remain silent and knowing what to say- *he knew that he must die and on the third day rise again*

So a reminder of the wisdom of god and the power of God- important for us to remember throughout our lives but particularly at times of crisis- be it health, bereavement, employment issues, difficult relationships- God is still in control and all powerful.

Not just times of crisis- God can and does still surprise us and amaze us.

2. Others

The JEWS AND GREEKS (or Gentiles) who were outside the church

V23- we preach Christ crucified- a "*stumbling block for Jews*"

At the time of Jesus the Jews knew the scripture from Deuteronomy 21.23: "Anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse"- no distinction between a tree and a cross- could not believe that the Messiah would die under God's curse strung up on a tree. So crucifixion was a stumbling block to Jews.

Likewise today many Muslims do not believe that Jesus could have died on the cross they either believe that Jesus was not put on the cross at all or that he somehow survived the cross.

Crucifixion was a means of death designed to be as cruel as possible – people could suffer for many hours or even sometimes days before they eventually died on a cross.

Generally the Romans reserved crucifixion for criminals convicted of murder, rebellion or armed robbery. Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion except in extreme cases of treason. Little was written about crucifixion except in the Bible.

Therefore the Gentiles or Romans had only scorn for the concept of a saviour dying on the cross. Hence v 23: *"A foolishness to the gentiles."*

In his book the Cross of Christ - John Stott describes an ancient cartoon drawn on a wall in Rome that shows a figure on a cross with the head of a donkey - the implication is that Christianity is "donkey worship". St Paul knew where the Jews and Gentiles who did not believe where coming from.

- So a challenge for us today to understand where people that we know are coming from—some will have intellectual issues with the Christian faith- others will be just indifferent or complacent- if we understand them- we can PRAY for them with more knowledge and given wisdom about how to share with them the good news of Jesus.

3. The Corinthians who were believers

- they had been Jews or Greeks too- and they had come to faith

V26- their background. They were not wise or influential
God chose the weak things and the lowly things. Just as Jesus chose humble fishermen to be his first disciples

CF 2 Corinthians 12v9 "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness."

So an encouragement for the Corinthians and an encouragement to us today.

God uses weak people:

- Joni Erickson Tada- spinal injury, paralysed by God as a Christian writer and speaker.
- Mother Theresa- physically frail particularly as she got older- used by the Lord to serve those in need in India and wide international ministry
- an old lady known to Linda and me- aged 99 old and frail and now short term memory loss but still shares about the Lord and His goodness to her carers .

This remains the opposite of the world's ways where we look for strength, intelligence and worldly power and success through what we can achieve ourselves.

So however weak we may feel in a situation we have the promise that God is with us and will give us his power and strength.

St Paul said to the Corinthians verse 30. 3 important words- righteousness, holiness and redemption- not words in everyday use today - 30 years or so ago- redemption centres (Green shield stamps!!)

But there is a challenge for us this Lent as we approach Easter in each of those 3 words.

GNB - v30 By Him we are put right with God

- we become God's holy people
- and are set free

Are we righteous or right with God – booklets that illustrate the Christian faith show that there is a gap between people and God because of sin and that gap can only be bridged by the cross that is as we trust in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour we receive his righteousness which cannot be earned.

Martin Luther said after he finally understood the phrase "righteousness from God" I felt myself reborn and to have gone through the open doors into paradise, the whole of scripture took on a new meaning. This became for me a gateway to heaven.

Are we becoming God's holy people?- It is made possible by Jesus dying on the cross and allowing the Holy Spirit to make us more like Jesus. Are we keen for this to continue to happen in our lives- Temple of the H.S. Do we know that we are redeemed or set free by Jesus dying for us on the cross. (bought back from evil for God- paid the price)

Conclusion

1. Wisdom of the cross- is God's wisdom and God's plan- (not the plan/work of people)
2. Wisdom of the cross is not understood by many in the world today
3. Wisdom of the cross is an encouragement to us in our weakness
4. By the wisdom of the cross we are made right with God by trusting in Jesus as our saviour, made God's holy people by his Spirit and are set free.