

St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA
The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge
Church Year A
1/29/17

Epiphany 4

Micah 8:6, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

I have news for you. You're all fools. That's right. Every one of you who is here today is a fool. Or at least you want to be one. Whether you know it or not, you want to be a fool. And of course I'm a fool too. Or at least I'm trying to be one, A fool, that is.

Pretty startling to think of yourself as a fool, isn't it? Or to think of this beautiful place, the beautiful wood, the stained glass, the dramatic Christus Rex, as being a home for fools.

I call you fools, and I call myself a fool – but better stated, we are all aspiring fools. We are all here today because the message of the cross is speaking to us in some profound way. The message of the cross – what Paul calls “God’s foolishness” – is calling us. We are here today, we aspiring fools, because we know – maybe without quite being able to articulate it – that this cross – this symbol of Christ crucified – this stumbling block is the perfect metaphor for the bringing together of our divided and pain- filled world.

But what does that even mean? Well, one thing it means is that God is in the middle of everything. **Especially** is God in the middle of the mess, the pain, the tragedy, the sadness – the divisions – of real life. It's in the midst of tragedy – in the midst of sin – that's where we can be sure to find God. After all, when we look at that beautiful Christus Rex what do we see? We see God hanging on the cross. We see God being put to death by the powers of the world. Or at least so they think. But what that Christus Rex tells us is that the crucifixion of God – our attempt to kill God – is at one and the same time the worst event in human history and the best event in human history.

Now, that's a big thought and I'm going to invite us to sit with it for just a minute. Maybe we can unpack that thought – that deeply contradictory thought by observing that like itself has a cross shaped pattern. Life isn't perfectly consistent and perfectly rational – the way we want it to be. And life isn't random and chaotic, the way the cynics and atheists think it to be. No, life is a coincidence of opposites. That's what the great Franciscan theologian, Fr. Bonaventure, observed. Life is a coincidence of opposites. A collision of cross purposes. Life is filled with contradictions needing to be reconciled. Remember that great Kris Kristofferson line, “You're a walking contradiction, partly truth and partly fiction?” That about sums us all up, I'd say. It's what makes living so hard sometimes. The holding together of all these contradictions. And it really feels like crucifixion. We have all been crucified. More than once. In fact, many times. And if you're not aware of your crucifixions, well, you just haven't been paying attention.

Holding the opposites, the contradictions of life, is really hard. But we have a pattern to follow. Jesus. The one hanging there on the cross.

And what did Jesus do? The simple answer is found in this morning's first reading from the Prophet Micah.

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly before your God.”

You might say that was Jesus' personal mission statement. His every act was an act of justice. His every thought was a thought of kindness. Every step he took was taken in an act of obedience to his Father's good will. We are living in this moment in a remarkably divided time. The divisions in our culture are in fact stark. And the temptation, and that's exactly what it is, a temptation, is to align ourselves on one side or another of all the divides we come across. To see dualistically. You know, it's either all good or it's all bad. It's either black or it's white. To say “I'm right and you're wrong.” The temptation there is the demand for perfection. Perfection in ourselves. Perfection in others. Perfection in our world. Not going to happen, folks!

All we can do is what we can do. Stand up, speak out, act for justice. And do it with a kind and merciful heart. Not with an angry, judgmental, “my way or the highway” heart. And above all, walk humbly before God. Seeking God's guidance and God's will in everything. Knowing you don't have all the answers and you won't ever have all the answers. But always, always, working to know God's will – God's justice – and then do it.

Look at how patient Jesus was with the ones who were broken and weak and had failed. And Jesus was patient with the ordinary. Jesus was the opposite of the judgmental, narrow, intolerant spirit of our age. And he certainly didn't allow the perfect to become the enemy of the good. Following Jesus isn't about finding the right words to say or the right things to do which will guarantee our entrance into Heaven sometime in the distant future. And following Jesus isn't about convincing others to conform to our concept of some ideal world. No, following Jesus is about answering the call to love the world the way God loves the world. In all its messiness and contradiction. Being in the middle of the pain of life with your eyes wide open. Being in the place of crucifixion – Golgotha – in faith and in trust that your own tomb will finally be empty.

The foolishness of the cross – the foolishness of our call to follow the pattern of Jesus life – is where salvation lies. In Jesus, crucified between two thieves, the good one and the bad one, hanging between heaven and earth, holding together in his broken body his humanity and his divinity, a male body with a feminine heart, as a Jewish believer who forgave and loved and welcomed everyone – and I mean everyone – to the table - the one who, as the Apostle Paul says, “reconciled all things to himself” – that's where our salvation lies. Following that pattern.

And it's nothing but foolishness. You know, Jesus didn't come to start a new religion. He really didn't. He came to do something much more important. He – meaning God – came among us to live out a message of vulnerability and mercy and unity that's foundational for **every** religion. That's foundational for the human soul. So, in our foolishness, we call Jesus the Savior of the World. Not in any competitive or triumphalist way – not in the “my religion is better than your religion” way that is so prevalent today and throughout history. No, by definition, vulnerability and mercy and humility don't compete. They don't dominate. Vulnerability and mercy and humility unite. And if that is foolish – if it's foolish to want to be united in love and mercy instead of divided by winners and losers, or champs and chumps, well, count me foolish. If it is foolish to want to walk alongside the powerless and the weak, well, count me foolish. If it's foolish to want to speak with kindness and mercy in the face of aggression and vitriol, well count me foolish. If it is foolish to want to walk humbly and lightly in the world, with an open mind and an open heart that doesn't have all the answers, well, count me foolish.

To do justice. To love kindness. To walk humbly before God. It's all foolishness to the angry spirit of this age. But my dear sisters and brothers, it's the Jesus way. The way of the Cross. So here's what I say. I say, let's all be fools. And let's be fools together. Let's let St. Thomas Church be known as a community of fools. Let's be thinking and discerning this week and in the weeks to come, how will we put our foolishness into action. How will we stand up for the ones who can't stand up for themselves? How will we make the Way of the Cross, the Way of the Fool, our way of living? What God-blessed foolishness that would be.

Amen