



Lent 3-March 7, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 and John 2:13-22

"The Power of the Cross"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

*In the second lesson for today, Paul declared, **"But we preach Christ crucified."** Isn't there something a little more exciting to preach about? Is Paul instructing his students to preach about the death and resurrection of Jesus in every sermon? Apparently, there were and still are others who are preaching something else since Paul seems to make a distinction between the messages that sound foolish, but are wise in God's eyes when he said, **"But we preach Christ crucified."***

*This kind of repetitious message of preaching the cross of Christ week after week indeed sounds foolish to many people. Paul goes on to make another statement that sounds even more foolish in verse 21 of the second lesson for today. Listen again, **"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe."***

*Did you understand these words of Paul? You are not saved by knowing God! You are simply saved by hearing and believing in a sermon preached about Christ who was crucified for you. Where does that leave messages that say you must accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior as you may hear in other sermons? This method sounds wise, but Paul declares it is foolishness in God's ears. What about hearing sermons so that you know right from wrong and sermons giving you pointers so you can follow Jesus better? Jesus said, **"Pick up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life you will lose it."** Last week we heard Jesus say, **"The son of man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."** Peter advised Jesus to preach something different. Something people would enjoy listening to, but Jesus didn't not change his sermon and set his path for Jerusalem where this story of death and resurrection would take place.*

John includes the story of when Jesus performed his first sign at the wedding in Cana just before this story you heard for today. Now that event makes for a more interesting sermon. This is what many people prefer to hear. Paul said that Jews demand signs. Not only Jews of course, but many people want an occasional sign from God so they have some proof. Some rather see Jesus in action doing something rather than just believing what he says. Signs are more fun to talk about. The disciples all witnessed the miracle of Jesus turning the six large stone jars of water into fine wine after Jesus' mother told him that the wine gave out. As amazing as this first sign was for the disciples to see, they were never instructed by Jesus to use it as an illustration in their sermons so that others would believe. Instead, Jesus told his disciples to keep all the miracles that they witnessed to themselves until after Jesus was raised from the dead.

Another event Jesus told his disciples to keep to themselves until after Easter was the one you heard today in the gospel reading when Jesus cleansed the temple. There is a dramatic contrast between how Jesus made a good wedding party better and how Jesus acted in the temple shouting at people, overturning tables of money, and whipping animals and their owners out of the temple. The Lenten verse we sang before hearing the gospel didn't seem to fit very well when we sang, "For he is gracious and merciful. SLOW TO ANGER and abounding in steadfast love." Rather it seemed like Jesus flew off the handle and would be recommended as a candidate for some anger management therapy.

I had always heard that the feeding of the 5000 and the resurrection of Jesus were the only two major stories about Jesus contained in all four gospels. However, this story about Jesus' tantrum in the temple also is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. These writers place this event near the end of Jesus' ministry while as you can see John places it at the beginning of his ministry since we are only in the second chapter of John.

What was it that made Jesus so angry? Jesus had likely attended this event at other times with his parents to celebrate the Passover. Jesus would have seen sheep and goats and doves in the temple before. For centuries, animals were sacrificed during the Passover and if people traveled a long distance it was easier to purchase the animal in Jerusalem rather than bring them from their homes. No doubt there was some corruption involved and it was an opportunity for poor people to be taken advantage of. On his other trips to Jerusalem, Jesus would have seen tables with money changers to exchange coins from other countries. Of course, these money changers weren't known for their honesty in making these exchanges. Had Jesus just reached the boiling point after seeing the corruption for many years and finally said "Enough is enough". Is this event in the life of Jesus your ticket to take a vocal stand on something that has been festering in you about the church? Some might preach what Jesus did in the temple that day as your opportunity to do the same today.

But Jesus didn't tell his disciples to use what happened that day as an example so could get angry when they witnessed the poor or underprivileged being taken advantage any more than he told them to use what they saw when he turned the water into wine as an example for people to look for signs rather than listen to proclamations about the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was angry that the temple had become an exchange system of paying money for sins regardless of whether people profited from this system or were taken advantage of because of it. Jesus was angry that the temple had become a marketplace and was no longer a house of prayer. Jesus had cleansed the temple of every animal and bird to be used as a sacrifice and then wanted people to know that the temple would no longer be a place to pay for sins. The sign that Jesus gave them that the temple which was under its 46th year of reconstruction was going to be destroyed and Jesus said that in three days he would raise it up.

We are told and we now know for certain that Jesus wasn't talking about the earthly temple, but he was talking about his death and his resurrection after being in the tomb for three days. The people that heard what Jesus said also thought what he said was foolishness and did not believe it. Jesus didn't give his disciples any more explanations and signs so that they would understand what he said. He only told them to wait until after he was raised from the dead and not that they would understand or have proof, but they would believe what Jesus had told them. They would believe what Jesus had proclaimed.

So today we continue to preach as Paul instructed. We preach Christ crucified. We preach that Jesus is the temple that we destroyed by our sinfulness, but without any help on our part, Jesus rose from the dead and has given salvation to everyone who believes this foolish idea that you can be saved simply by hearing this good news.

This message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Amen

