

Epiphany 4-January 29, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 and Matthew 5:1-12

“God Chose Foolishness”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace mercy and peace to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen Last week, we learned in the fourth chapter of Matthew that Jesus had chosen four fishermen to become his disciples. Each of these fishermen after receiving this new calling left their nets behind that they used to catch fish and began to follow Jesus. Jesus told them that he would provide all they would need as they were sent out as his disciples to gather people rather than fish. We just heard in this gospel reading that apparently Jesus uses similar methods for gathering people as his Peter, Andrew, James, and John did when they were fishing for fish with their nets.

Last week, we also heard that Jesus preached a very short sermon. Nine words to be precise. However, this week, Jesus begins a very long sermon that has been given the title, “The Sermon on the Mount” which is so long that you will only hear the introduction to Jesus’ sermon this week. The sermon title that has been assigned to Jesus’ sermon is not very clever or original. It simply comes from where we learn he delivered the sermon. Matthew says he **went up the mountain**, thus “The Sermon on the Mount”. However, the sermon title that has been assigned to this sermon Jesus preached doesn’t matter as much as what came out of Jesus’ mouth when he began to speak. This introduction to his sermon has also been given a title that we have come to know as the Beatitudes.

Matthew divides the people that are surrounding Jesus on the mountain into two groups of listeners. The first group are Jesus’ disciples and then the second group are the crowd of people that the disciples have gathered to come and listen to Jesus. Jesus seems to accomplish two purposes when he delivers this sermon to these two groups of people. The scene on the mountain that Matthew describes seems to have Jesus’ disciples seated closer to Jesus and we are told that he is teaching them, but as he is teaching his disciples, the crowd is also listening, and they are getting much more than the lesson his disciples need to learn. The crowd that the disciples have gathered to hear Jesus are hearing good news that is surprising to them.

When the disciples used their nets to catch fish and brought them to shore, the next job they had was to begin sorting the wide variety of fish they caught. There would be times that these disciples would catch fish but would be skunked as far as the kind of fish they wanted to catch as they looked into their nets. Sometimes the fish that they caught were not what would be desired by others, so they would cast the unwanted fish back into the sea. It would be very unusual that after drawing their nets to shore that there wouldn’t be some sorting to do. After sorting through the different kinds and sizes of fish in their net, their goal would be to have a catch of fish that others would want to purchase. Their goal would be to have what many South Dakota fishermen like to end their day of fishing. The disciples hoped to have a picture perfect string of walleyes that are within an inch of length from each other. They hoped to have a string of fish to be envied by others who might see their great catch posted on Facebook. But for that to happen using a net, you have to sort the undesirables from the ones you choose to keep.

When Jesus saw the crowds that the disciples had gathered, they looked like a net of fish that had yet to be sorted. In fact, it looked like a net of fish that after bringing it to shore and seeing what was in it would have all been dumped back into the sea. By worldly standards, there wasn’t a keeper in the bunch. But Jesus taught his disciples what he sees compared to what the world sees. As Jesus delivered his Beatitudes to the disciples and to the crowd, Jesus did divide the catch of people into groups. Jesus saw people who were overcome by oppression. Jesus saw people who were still mourning after someone, or something had been taken from them. Jesus saw people who were hungry and thirsting to hear a word of forgiveness after living a life of guilt and shame. Jesus also saw people that were good at helping others by being merciful, good hearted, and were doing their best at encouraging peace rather than division. But after Jesus saw this variety of people, he didn’t start sorting. Instead after looking at them, he blessed them. Jesus didn’t wait for the

weak to become strong or the sad to become happy or the hungry and thirsty to be filled before extending his blessing. Jesus blessed them right where they were. Jesus chose them all and blessed them all.

This is what seems so foolish to the world today. God chooses what we would cast out or want to change. God doesn't provide a series of books in the bible as self-help tools to make you better people. God doesn't look at people and label them by their condition as we so often do. God looks at people and blesses them despite what others believe are signs of weakness. Jesus was the ultimate example of weakness as died on the cross and this message of the cross continues to be foolish to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. God's power to save came in what others consider the foolishness of the cross.

Almost hidden and often overlooked in the second reading from 1 Corinthians is how God has decided to save his people. God's choice of saving people is considered foolish by many still today. God decided, through the foolishness of our preaching, to save those who believe. Yes, God has saved you by sending you his word to be spoken by a preacher to tell you that you are saved.

Whenever people gathered around Jesus, Jesus would look at them and open his mouth and choose them and save them. On the cross, people were watching Jesus' die, but Jesus looked at them and opened his mouth and said, "Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." Jesus was choosing people into his kingdom as he spoke his very last words and he is doing the very same thing with preachers today. Preachers continue to look at congregations of people and deliver Christ's words of forgiveness to a wide variety of people that would otherwise be rejected by the rest of the world.

This is a stumbling block for many because it makes salvation seem too easy. And not only is it easy for you and I, it is free. There is nothing you can do. But it wasn't easy for Jesus Christ who suffered for each of us on the cross. This is a stumbling block for those who believe salvation is yours for the choosing, but today you never heard Paul, Jesus or me tell you that salvation is yours for the choosing. No, it is God who chose the weak. God chose what is foolish in the world. God chose what is low and despised. And best of all God has opened his mouth again today and has chosen you. Yes, blest are you for yours is the kingdom of God. Amen