

Matthew (5: 1-12)

Here at St. Thaddaeus, We are blessed to worship, in this beautiful building. And dominating everything is that cross over the altar.

I think it's especially attractive when draped by the multicolored hanging. So, take a moment . . . Look at it. . . and appreciate it. And then, stop and think what it represents. We adorn our churches with and instrument of death. We have as our symbol of faith, a sign of capital punishment of the worst kind.

Now if Jesus had died by hanging, I suppose we would have a noose over the altar. . . .or if by firing squad a rifle. . . .or, by lethal injection a hypodermic needle. . . . but *we have a cross*. A cross to remind us of evil and good. A cross to remind us of sin and redemption. To remind us of death and life.

St Paul writing to the church in the city of Corinth said for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those of us who are being saved it is the power of God. So what is the message of the cross? Why is the cross an instrument of death, an instrument of capital punishment by the state, so important?

St Paul saw the cross as central to the Christian faith. He knew that the Greek mind looked for wisdom and that the Jew sought signs. He knew the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. And yet he vowed to preach nothing but Christ crucified. Why? I think it's because he knew that the cross represented Christ as nothing else does and he knew that the Christ represented the power and the wisdom of God as nothing else does. For the foolishness of God, is Wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God, is stronger than human strength.

Paul is showing the young church in Corinth the difference between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God as represented by the cross. Weakness rather than strength; vulnerability, rather than force; Love, rather than hate. . . . the very opposite of the values of the world.

To Paul and his converts who are being saved, Jesus has transformed the emblem of a cruel death into the symbol of the loving power of the Almighty God. And Paul also says that it is the church which represents a radical reversal of the world's values.

Not many of you were wise or influential or of noble birth. But God *chose you*. Initially God chose for his church foolish people, . . . lowly and despised people. . . . people whose very existence, the world ignored. So that whatever the church accomplished, it could not boast about it. . . . It could only give God the glory. Now, is that the church you and I know? Or have we become, "Cultural Christians"? Do we look to the power of the Cross or to the power of the world? The wisdom of God. . . .or the wisdom of the world?

Of course, the world's wisdom has a place for religion, make no mistake about it. The world welcomes the church, as long as it stays and its place. In fact, the belief that America is a Christian nation, wrapping the cross in the flag or putting *In God We Trust* on our license plate is often quite popular. But the world has no room for those foolish things which God has said is important. To do justice. . . . to love mercy. . . . and to walk outwardly with our God.

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Marcus Borg and his book meeting Jesus again for the first time says that the wisdom of the world is pretty much summed up in *What You See Is What You Get. . . . What You See Is What You Get.* That is, human satisfaction and meaning come from the visible world of ordinary experience and Borg says the material world lives according to its dominant values which he refers to as the three A's. **A**chievement.. . . **A**ffluence and **A**ppearance.

I think that's a pretty good description of the wisdom of the world. **A**chievement.. . . **A**ffluence **A**ppearance has the church. . . .have you and I bought into those values? Do we live our lives judging ourselves and others by achievement. . . by affluence. . . by appearance? If those are our values, if that is what we embrace as wisdom, then what in the world do we do with Jesus and His cross? What do we do make of the Beatitudes in today's Gospel? If achievement affluence and appearance are our values, then how ridiculous does the Sermon on the Mount sound?

Anyone making a list of the truly happy in this world would not include the poor, or those who mourn, or the meek. After all nice guys finish last and they're usually called losers. Our list of the truly happy wouldn't include those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, or the persecuted, or the Merciful. . . . (after all they are easy marks and toughness is essential and making it in the world), or the pure in heart. (Who is pure and today's society), or even, the peacemakers . . . Jesus must have been deluded, when he called such people blessedor happy. . . or fortunate.

So, was Jesus deluded or divine. . . that's the question. . . . was he deluded or divine? You see Jesus really means to reverse the world's wisdom and the world's values. He really really means to promise to such unlikely people as he lists in the Beatitudes the kingdom of heaven. And the Kingdom is theirs, not because they try hard to be meek or merciful and so on. No, the kingdom is theirs, because of God's grace, because of God's freely given love, and it is a costly Grace symbolized by the cross.

In calling us to be His decuples, the Christ frees us from the wisdom of this world, to be his ridiculous, blessed people.

So, are we willing to accept the folly of discipleship? The reversal of the world's wisdom? If we don't, we choose to cut ourselves off from Christ's liberating Grace. Now make no mistake about it. . . . that is not an easy choice, but I hope no one's ever told you that being a Christian is easy.

So which will be for you. . . . the wisdom of the world, **A**chievement. . . . **A**ffluence **A**ppearance. or the wisdom of God?

Salvation for those who trust in the apparent folly of the cross of Christ. Hear Paul again, "Consider your own call brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God shows what is low and despised in the world things that are not. . . . to reduce to nothing. . . . things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

May God grant us grace to look to the cross and to the One who stretches out His loving arms to embrace us. Amen.