



Distracted Driving

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Preached FCCW 3-8-2015

There are different forms of knowledge,  
and different kinds of wisdom,  
and all have their proper place.

But they are not all interchangeable.

The right knowledge effectively applied  
to the appropriate context  
would be considered wisdom;  
while applying the same wisdom in a different situation  
would be utter foolishness.

Case in point: during the French Revolution  
three prisoners were condemned to die.

A priest, a lawyer, and an engineer.

The priest was led first to the guillotine.

The executioner pulled the rope to release the blade  
...and nothing happened.

Applying his theological expertise,  
the priest leapt to his feet  
and declared that they had all just witnessed  
an act of Divine Providence.

Since it was clearly God's will that he not die,  
they must release him.

The lawyer was then led to the guillotine.

The executioner pulled the rope to release the blade.

Again, the blade did not budge.

The lawyer summoned his knowledge of the law  
to make the case that since it was not legal  
for a man to face execution twice for the same crime,  
they were obligated to set him free, as well.

Finally, the engineer was brought to the guillotine.

Before he knelt down before it,  
he looked up at the mechanism for releasing the blade,  
and exclaimed,

"Oh, hey, I see what the problem is!"

A few years ago, comedian Bill Maher produced  
a documentary called "Religulous."

He came up with the title by combing the words  
religious and ridiculous.

Which tells you something about his take on religion.

The trailer for the movie flashes images  
that mock religious people and practices,  
all set to the music of Gnarl Barkley's song "Crazy."

The not so subtle point the film tries to make is  
that nobody in their right mind would believe in God.

That the supposed wisdom of religion

is in reality, foolishness.

It's an opinion shared by many in our mainstream culture,  
who view Christians who believe in  
and try to live by the gospel  
as gullible or naive.

Like kids who never outgrew their belief  
in unicorns or mermaids.

Well, the greatest influence on Christianity  
aside from Jesus himself

- the Apostle Paul -

would be the first to agree that  
there is a certain foolishness to Christianity.

Not the kind of craziness that

Bill Maher focuses on in his movie,  
or which tends to make the evening news  
or go viral on the Internet;  
stuff like seeing the face of Jesus  
in a grilled cheese sandwich.

But the foolishness that Jesus lived  
and taught his disciples to live by.

The foolishness of dealing with enemies  
through forgiveness instead of vengeance.

The foolishness of believing that God  
listens to and cares about  
each and every prayer that we make.

The foolishness of a God who would become a person  
and then give up his life on a cross  
to save the world.

The real problem is not so much that

the message of the cross is absolute nonsense  
to those who are caught up in  
a violent, materialistic and self-centered world.

That in itself, is nothing new.

It's been going on since Paul's day.

What should be worrisome, and often isn't,  
is not that those OUTSIDE the Church  
dismiss the Gospel as so much foolishness;  
but that, more often than we'd care to admit,  
people INSIDE the church do the same thing.

In his book "Blue Like Jazz"

Generation X author Donald Miller says,

"The goofy thing about Christian faith is that  
you believe it and don't believe it at the same time.

It isn't unlike having an imaginary friend.

I believe in Jesus;

I believe He is the Son of God,

but every time I sit down

to explain this to somebody

I feel like a palm reader,

like somebody who works at a circus

or a kid who is always making things up,

or somebody at a Star Trek convention

who hasn't figured out the show isn't real."

Lent is often thought of as a time for

private and personal reflection about

where our relationship with God could use some work.

But it can also be a time for

collective self-examination.

A time to pause and reflect on  
how we are doing as a congregation  
in fulfilling our purpose.

Times of uncertainty, risk, and crisis  
are when you would expect churches  
to put their faith in God's wisdom and guidance.

What often happens though, is that churches  
ditch God's wisdom as if it were suddenly  
exposed as foolishness  
and reach for some other kind of wisdom to replace it.

It may be a form of wisdom that can be trusted  
in certain secular contexts -  
say, the business world or the world of politics.

It might be a kind of knowledge that has some guidance to offer.

But it's a dangerous thing to adopt a wisdom  
that conflicts with the wisdom of faith.

Just this week, J. Bennett Guess of the UCC  
compared this tendency to treat God's wisdom like foolishness  
to distracted driving.

You don't need me to tell you about the perils of distracted driving.

We get warned about it all the time.

Texting, or even talking on the phone when you're driving  
can make you miss a turn and lose your way.

It can even lead to an accident.

Rev. Guess wrote:

"Just as distracted driving can lead us

into a ditch, or much worse,

distracted discipleship can lead us

into dangerous territory, too.

We can become so busy and preoccupied with saving the institution of the church that what it's supposed to be about becomes almost impossible for us, much less outsiders, to distinguish."

One method churches have for avoiding distracted driving - or distracted discipleship - is to have a Mission Statement.

If you haven't visited our new church website, the first thing you see when you log on is the Mission Statement of this church in big, bold letters. It says, "The purpose of this church shall be to worship God, preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate the sacraments; to realize Christian fellowship and unity within this church and the Church universal; to render loving service towards this community and to the world; and to strive for righteousness, justice and peace."

But Mission Statements aren't intended to be relegated to websites and By Laws.

They are meant to be a tool for keeping the vision of the church focused on the road ahead of it, so that it isn't distracted by other, lesser forms of wisdom that cannot get it to where it is supposed to be going.

I would go so far as to suggest that every Annual Meeting, Council or Committee meeting,

should begin, not only with prayer,  
but also with a reading of our Mission Statement,  
as a deterrent to distracted driving  
in all our planning and decision-making.

There's no avoiding the fact that the only time  
we hear about Jesus really losing his temper  
was when he saw God's Temple being run  
like a marketplace instead of a Sanctuary.

Jesus has outlined his wisdom for  
steering through the challenges churches face.

He said, "Only people who don't know God  
are always worrying about such things.

Your Father knows what you need.

But put God's work first,  
and these things will be yours as well." (CEV)

That's advice that would be scoffed at  
as foolishness and weakness

by a lot of people outside the Church.

And at times by some of us inside the Church.

But the Church always has, and always will,  
be at its best

when it is guided by the faith that

"God is wiser than human wisdom,

and the weakness of God

is stronger than human strength."

Let's pray: Lord, let us trust in your Wisdom  
- the wisdom of the Cross -  
and may we be ever faithful in proclaiming  
Christ crucified and resurrected,  
even if that makes us appear foolish to the world.

Or even to ourselves.  
Amen.