

Exodus 20: 1-17  
Psalm 19  
I Corinthians 1: 18-25  
St. John 2: 13-22

Lent III 2024.

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“For the foolishness of God is wiser than people...” I Corinthians 1: 25a

Years ago, I was walking through the student lounge in a large university, while a young man was talking about the Parable of the Lost Sheep. We all likely remember the story – a shepherd has 100 sheep, and one of them goes missing, and so the shepherd leaves the flock and looks high and low for the lost sheep until he finds it, and brings it back to the flock. The young graduate student said something like this, “That’s a ridiculous story! It’s illogical! Why on earth would a shepherd leave the flock of 99 to look for 1 sheep?... Meanwhile, the whole flock is in danger; 99 is 99 times more valuable than one stupid sheep...”

I think the mistake that young man was making was to try to understand God’s passion for his people in sheerly intellectual terms – trying to calculate the economic value of the flock... We know that parable is a story about God’s *love* for his wandering sheep – that’s you and me – so that the shepherd will spare no effort to bring us to safety... There is something about God’s love which is far more powerful than a cold, clinical evaluation of financial costs and benefits. For God, no price is too high. God the Son paid the full price for our foolish, senseless wanderings...

God’s love is more like the Parable of the Prodigal Son and his brother. When the prodigal son returns home, the father doesn’t worry about decorum – what’s *proper!*... He runs to meet his wayward son, and embraces him, and holds him fast. It was as if his son were dead, but is now alive again. God’s love for us is deep and wide; the love with which he pursues us is beyond measure... Mere cold intellectual analysis cannot make sense of the depth of God’s love...

Here is a comparison which might be helpful... In the first parish where I served, a rural parish, there was a bad house fire in the 1940's. The mother and some of the children escaped the flames, but then the mother realized that her *baby* was still inside! The neighbours tried to persuade her not to go back inside the flaming house – surely the baby could not have survived that inferno – yet, her love for her baby was so strong, the mother couldn’t stay back!... She ran back *into* the flaming home in a desperate effort to rescue her baby!... Tragically, she failed – both mother and infant perished... That love which is beyond all rational measure is, I suggest, a hint of the depths of God’s love for his wayward people...

The second reading today is from First Corinthians. It seems that the Corinthians were mostly a working-class congregation. After all, St. Paul writes,

For consider your call, brothers and sisters, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise...

Now, I don't want to give the impression that I am suggesting that our minds, our capacity for thought and reason, should be discarded when we are Christians. Far from it!... God has given us minds to use. I believe it was the great Reformer Charles Wesley who once remarked, "God did not give us the Holy Spirit to save us the trouble of thinking..."

Our Canadian legal system developed out of a Christian understanding of justice in the world. Our Canadian medical system emerged out of a Christian world view of healing and compassion... So too, our educational system, including our universities, arose out of the Christian world view that God has given us *minds* to use for his honour and glory!... Many of the founders of Canadian universities, including Bishop Charles Ingham, the first Canadian Anglican bishop, were deeply committed Christians...

I do believe that the intellectual culture of our Canadian universities today has too often fallen prey to the spirit of the age; but, that doesn't mean that we ought to abandon education, or thinking... Rather, the Christian Church – that's us – are called to pour love into our communities – God's love – and to work to build Christ's kingdom... This includes the big questions of a liberal arts education... Not all of us are called to serve God that way – but some of us are...

So, let's be clear: Being a mature Christian does not mean being anti-intellectual, or against education... But I suggest it *is* true that our minds *alone* – or even the very best education – will *not* produce faith... Rather, it is the use of our minds *along with* our hearts and our wills, that draw us to Jesus... He reveals himself to our whole being, including minds and our hearts...

We note that St. Paul the Apostle had an extremely sharp mind, and his contribution to the New Testament, and to the life of the apostolic Church, is beyond measure... Yet, Paul writes the congregation in Corinth, "Jews demand signs" (that is, some Jewish believers might want to be entertained by miracles, like the parting of the Red Sea, to know God is real) "Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom (the Greek-trained philosophers want clever arguments), but we preach Christ crucified..." That's the core of the Christian faith – that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and rose again..."

This past Tuesday, the on-line Bible study was reading about the crucifixion of Jesus. Taken by itself, it's a horrible historical record of Jesus of Nazareth being abused, tortured, and killed by crucifixion!... It's upsetting to read – and so it should be. But that doesn't mean we should shy away from it... We are confronted with it... We realize we're part of the story... Astonishingly, it's our perfect hope...

Let us give everything in our lives over for the advancement of God's purposes. This includes who we love, and how we love... It includes our wills; the choices we make. It includes our work, our homes and our neighbourhoods. It includes our sexuality – and, it includes our *minds*... God the Holy Spirit will, Jesus says, “lead us all into truth...”

Core to our ministry is sharing Jesus' death and resurrection. (We preach Christ crucified...) We aren't supposed to avoid it because it's uncomfortable. Rather, it is God's perfect victory...

Amen.