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Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
3rd Sunday In Lent
March 7th, 2021

“Holding Your Brain Captive To The Bible”

God’s PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from 1st Corinthians 1,

The message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.....Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God, through man’s wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach, to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ – the power of God, and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase: *“You need to check your brain at the door”*; which means: *‘Don’t let your preconceived notions about something, muck up the truth.’* Luther said, *“We are to have a ministerial use of our reason, not a majesterial use.”* A ministerial use of our reason is when we hold our brains captive to God’s Word; whereas, a majesterial use of our reason is when we make our brains bigger than the Bible. I’ll never forget what one pastor said, *“A ‘god’ who can fit inside of my brain ain’t God. And a ‘god’ who can fit inside of your brain, definitely ain’t ‘god’.”*

Paul says, “*We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Gentiles.*” So why was Christ a stumbling block to the Jews? The Jews expected a Messiah who would be a Rambo or Terminator, and conquer all their enemies; not a Savior who comes in weakness, to die. When Jesus said the only way to be forgiven was for Him to die on the cross; that meant the good works of the Pharisees, and the “*just-going-through-the-motions-worship*” of the Priests didn’t accomplish anything. In fact, unless one repents and trusts in Jesus, their good works actually make them more guilty, for they’re using their good works to reject Jesus. Jesus was scandalous to the Jews because they were making their brains bigger than the Bible, and their brains told them that God cannot be three persons in One God, and the infinite God cannot take up residence in a finite human body. To the Jews, Jesus was a stone that made them stumble because God cannot die, and yet Jesus claimed He was God, and yet must die, to give the world life. And finally, Jesus was scandalous, by the company He kept, rubbing shoulders with tax-collectors, prostitutes, low-lives, and the diseased.

What about the Gentiles? How was Christ foolishness to the Gentiles? It was unreasonable to the Gentiles for God to take one flesh. It was ridiculous to believe that a virgin became pregnant with God. It was outrageous for the Savior of the world to be born in a stable, instead of a palace; to be wrapped in rags, and not in silk; to sleep in a feed trough, rather than an ivory crib. Gentiles also thought it was foolish to believe that God would keep the company that Jesus kept on earth. Above all, the cross was the biggest offense: that Christianity’s Savior was a criminal; and if our God dies on a cross how can He give us anything, much less life? And how can a dead Jesus, RISE?

To be honest, these are the same reasons people still give today for blowing off Jesus. The BIG question today is: “Is Christ a stumbling block and foolishness to you too?” We often refuse to hold our reason captive to God’s Word, either because we’re too lazy to study it, or because that would mean: ‘*I don’t have all the answers.*’ We often don’t want to utterly trust in Jesus, for than I have to admit my weakness to solve my own problems. We often doubt that ONLY Jesus’ works, and shed blood can save me, because that would mean my being cool, and living my life as if I had it all together, contributes nothing to my salvation; and that I’m no better than anyone else who stands before the cross. And the danger is this: whenever you belittle your sins, in all of their ugliness; you belittle the Gospel in all of its beauty. Confess your sins in all of their ugliness, and then realize God still loves you, and Jesus forgives you. The greater the depth of our sins we admit, the greater the height of God’s love in Christ we enjoy. **Pg 2**

Whenever we comes to WHO God is, and WHAT He has done to save us, we need to hold our brains captive to God's Word. Yes, God gave us our reason and intellect to use, above all for the discovery of God's love and beauty. But we must always hold our reason captive to God's Word, for, as Luther says, "*Although my reason can err, God and His Word cannot err.*" Almost every heresy in the church, and many outside of the church, arose from those who have tried to make the Triune God, the two natures of Christ - that Jesus is true God and true man - and the works of God more reasonable. But the problem is, that while you cook up a God who's more reasonable to your brain, then He's no longer Biblical anymore. I'll never forget what Luther once said, "*If you come upon something in the Bible that you cannot understand, rather than changing its' meaning, give the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are.*"

In our text, Paul says, "***Jews seek signs, and gentiles look for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Gentiles.***" Now, why, exactly, is the cross "*a stumbling block and foolishness to so many people*"? First of all, because it asks you to believe the impossible: that the infinite God became man in the flesh of Jesus; and that this God, Who cannot die, died in the person of Christ on Good Friday. And that this God, Who is perfect in every way, died to save us sinner who are imperfect in every way. But wait a minute, who are you and I to tell God what He can and cannot do. Who are you and I to tell God that "*You can't be that loving?*" If God is able to do all things, and the Bible says He is, Matthew 6, "***with God nothing is impossible***", and He backed up His claims with an empty tomb, then He can love anyone He chooses to love, save anyone He wants to save, and do it in any way that He deems necessary, whether or not your brain can figure out why He did, what He did.

Secondly, the cross is a "*stumbling block and foolishness*", because it posits a love that no one, in their right mind, believes to be a reasonable. God's Word proclaims that the perfect and dearly-loved Son of God, Jesus, willingly became a criminal, by having all of our crimes imputed to Him, and that He willingly died a criminal's death to forgive us, simply because He loved those who despised Him, and wanted them to live with Him forever. But, before you say, "*That's unreasonable. God can't forgive sinners that easily*"; wait a minute. Rather than telling God who He can love, and cannot love; let Him tell you who He loves "***God so loved the world***", John 3:16; and how much He loves us. Romans 5, "***This is how God proved His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***" Rather than refuse God's grace, just enjoy it. **Page 3**

Thirdly, the cross is foolishness, and a stumbling block, because it forces us to admit our inability to save ourselves. You can't save yourself or satisfy God's wrath against you by your own performance. God says there is no "*Salvation by Addition*": "well I did this, and I did that, and I did this, and I did that, therefore God has to let me into heaven. That's like saying because I wash the dishes, pay my taxes, and make my family's favorite chicken casserole; therefore, God has to take me to His heaven. That's nonsense. The Bible says in Isaiah 59, "***Your sins will separate you from your Lord.***" And only Jesus' shed blood forgives us. 1st John 1, "***The blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.***" The fact is, if God took us to heaven without Christ's forgiveness, we'd be vaporized in an instant. God's Word also tells us there is no "*Salvation by Subtraction*": "*I don't do this, and I don't do that, and I don't do this and I don't do that, and so, God has to take me to heaven*". That's like saying, "*I don't drink, and I don't chew, and I don't date girls that do,*" therefore, God has to take me home to heaven. We've got a word for that kind of thinking. It's 'Bologna'! Finally, there's no salvation by comparison, '*Well I'm better than this person, and I'm certainly not as bad as that person*', so if God's going to take anyone to heaven, it's certainly going to be me. That's like saying, "*I can bench-press more dead-weight than my grandma, therefore, God has to let me into heaven*". The cross is God's evidence that it took a great deal more than our honey-do projects, to open up heaven for us sinners.

Fourthly, the cross is foolishness and a stumbling block, because it forces you to admit your own inability to even come to faith or believe in Jesus on your own. Ephesians 2 says, "***As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you use to live - and dead things can't do anything for themselves – and were, by nature, objects of wrath. But, because of His great love for us, God, Who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our sins. It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this NOT of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so no one can boast.***" Imagine it like this. Think of a person who has a heart attack and falls to the ground. He's flat-lined. His heart isn't beating. He's no longer breathing. But those who see it happen rush over to help. Now while He's unconscious, flat-lined, not breathing, his heart has stopped beating, and has died; can he CHOOSE treatment? No. He's dead. Can he ACCEPT treatment? No. He's dead. But can he RECEIVE treatment? Yes he can. So they put the paddles on him, even without His permission, and shock his heart back to life. You and I can't even take credit for believing in Jesus, the Holy Spirit brought us to faith, and God receives all the glory for saving us. **Page 4**

But, if you think any of the things I've just mentioned are scandalous, do you know what's even more scandalous? Our sins forfeited a place in God's family, and in God's heaven. And, by our sins, we deserve to be eternally punished in hell. And yet, God's dear Son, Jesus, refused to live life, or spend eternity without YOU! As a result, Jesus goes to hell and back to save us. That's the scandal of all scandals. That should throw a cog in your gears. It should cause your 6-cylinder engine, to start firing on 8 cylinders. The scandal of all scandals is that the first person of the Trinity put the second person of the Trinity to death for to save you and me. This is how loved you are by God. This should cause your heart to start palpitating, and your brain waves to short-circuit. What is foolishness to this world, is the very scandal we cherish; that a God so great, would stoop so low, to love us so much, to send a Son so loved, to suffer so greatly, to forgive a people so sinful, to raise us so high, to receive a life so long, in a kingdom so perfect, through a Savior so great! This should cause us to burst into song: *"My Song is love unknown! My Savior's love to Me! Love to the loveless shown, that we might lovely be!*

And it is the wonderful scandal of the Gospel that leads us to live scandalous lives. Not scandalous in the sense of sinful, but scandalous in the eyes of a sinful world: That we will humbly serve one another, rather than demanding our way is scandalous to the world; that we will honor God's choices with our bodies, rather than please our nerve endings sinfully, is scandalous in a sinful world; that we will confess Christ on campus, at the store, on the job, and over the fence; that's scandalous in our world; that we will love other sinners, and those who don't know Jesus with reckless abandon; that's scandalous in a sinful world; that we will re-prioritize our schedules to worship Jesus with our family, that's scandalous to the world; that we are willing to be *'booed for Christ'* in enemy territory by confessing Christ, that's scandalous in our world. That we're willing to be seen as politically incorrect, or Jesus freaks, to stand up for God's Word; that's scandalous in our world; that we're willing to give up our time, talents, and treasures to serve Jesus' agenda, rather than ours, is scandalous in this sinful world. That we're willing to confess our sins, and forgive those who have hurt us, rather than seek revenge, that's scandalous to this world. Why any of this? Why all of this? The scandal of Jesus' cross. In Christ's body, on the cross, my slate is clean, my past is forgiven, my life is restored, my conscience cleansed, my devil conquered, my grave opened, my death defeated, my scars healed, all because God the Father so cherished His Son's spilled blood, that He said, I will not hold your sins against you anymore. If the world thinks you're nuts for believing that, invite them to join the asylum. Amen.