

Lent 3 – March 4, 2018

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Theme: Have You Tried Everything Yet?

**Do you want something in your life to change for the better? You can think up your own ideas but Paul suggests turning to the Word of God. Paul says the Word of God is folly to the wise, but the power of God to those being saved. People dream up their own ideas for how to change something they don't like, but their own ideas almost always serve their own sinful desires. We can explain and defend our own ideas, but we know in our hearts, that the motivation is never completely pure. The difference with God's ideas is that they not only are pure and holy, but they are powerful in and of themselves.**

**St. Paul says, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." He does not defend the word of the cross. Neither does he try to explain it so that the Corinthians might better understand it. Like the 10 Commandments in our Old Testament reading, the word is largely unintelligible to sinful human beings. Oh sure, we can come up with many reasons why we should not kill one another but as soon as we are wronged, suddenly thoughts of violence and hatred fill our minds. We are excellent at explaining to children why it is good for them to obey their parents, and then we completely ignore any civil law that we find annoying or cumbersome. Sure the law is good. It's good for other people, but I don't need it!**

**The reason we are like that is that God's Law is unintelligible to our fallen, sinful nature. Our sinful nature only cares about what serves its sinful desires. And like a pig's ear, we can dress it up but it's never going to be a silk purse. On the other hand, it is not necessary for our sinful nature to understand in order for**

it to benefit from God's holy word. I'd have to call Sara if I wanted to understand the chemical process of Aleve, but nevertheless I like what it does for my back when it hurts. I don't have to understand it to enjoy its benefits.

I tend to be the last place people come. People usually come to me after their best thinking has landed them in a difficult situation. Please, don't put too much confidence in what you think, especially about spiritual matters. If it's your unique idea, it's probably wrong. So far, when I have asked what they have already done to solve the problem, I have never heard two specific answers. I have probably heard every other answer in the book. They have made lists. They have been to professionals for advice. They have talked it over with friends and loved ones. They have read various self-help books and manuals. But so far, no one has ever told me that: 1) they have been going to church as often as possible to learn from God's Word and receive the Sacrament, and 2) they have been reading the Bible daily to search for a solution to their problem.

Why read the Bible, people think? The Bible is just a bunch of stories from thousands of years ago. What could it possibly have to say about my unique problem here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? And church? Church is just a bunch of people reciting words and singing songs. Fine if you're into that kind of stuff, but how will that address my problem?

"Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block

**to Jews and folly 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.”**

**The Word of God, which we read in the Bible and hear from the pulpit and sing in the hymns and liturgy has the power of God contained within it to fix everything you need fixed. The body and blood of Christ which you receive through the bread and the wine has the power of God contained within it to fix everything you need fixed. This is foolishness to the world! My marriage is falling apart! I owe thousands of dollars that I cannot pay. I have a terminal illness. How can the Bible and the Lord’s Supper fix any of that? It makes no sense! But hear me well. I did not say that the power of God would fix everything you want fixed. I said it would fix everything you NEED fixed.**

**What you see as a horrible tragedy, God may see as an opportunity. What you think you need may not be at all what you need. You may need to go through some pain and suffering to learn, to grow, to be hardened and refined. When I was 9 years old, my father lost everything. We went bankrupt, lost our home, lost one of our cars, lost all of our investments. My mother had to sell her wedding silver to buy food and cash in the life insurance to pay rent on a tiny one bedroom dump where I slept in the unfinished basement. We left our home with nothing but our clothes and what furniture we could get into a small U-Haul. We saw it as a horrible tragedy. No one volunteers for being poor.**

**However, God saw it as an opportunity. It was shortly thereafter that we started going to church every Sunday instead of popping in for Christmas, Easter, weddings and funerals. Everyone saw what happened to us as a great tragedy.**

**We saw what happened to us as a great tragedy, but God used what happened to us to reclaim my parents from a life of cocktail parties keeping up with the Jones. Not only that but he put me on the path to becoming a pastor. I was never happy to have become poor. Being poor is horrible, but I am now able to see God at work through the hardships that we bore and we would have never come up with the plan he had in mind. Nor would we have agreed to it if we had any choice.**

**From 1969 to 1972, leading up to the great loss, I am certain that my parents thought they knew what needed to be fixed and were trying their very best to fix it. I'm sure they prayed to God to fix it, especially towards the end. But what needed fixing was not monetary. What needed fixing was spiritual. What good would it have been if we had become multi-millionaires and lost our souls? A few years of prosperity followed by an eternity of damnation? God knew what needed to be fixed. He fixed it. He set it up by taking away our false gods and directed us to his Church where we could be healed and empowered through the power of his Word and Sacrament. I have been blessed to see what he did and have come to understand it.**

**The Word and Sacraments contain the power of God. Want your problems fixed the way they need to be fixed? Read the Bible every day and come receive his body and blood every week. I know it sounds foolish. But it is the foolishness of God! It is the foolishness that God gives to shame the wise and the strong.**