

Wise Up – Broken Wisdom
1 Corinthians 1:18-25
Good Friday
April 14, 2017

For 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. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

The Greek philosopher, Socrates, died a good death. He believed in the immortality of the soul. In his way of thinking, death was a breakthrough to a higher, purer life. Calmly and even cheerfully, he drank the cup of hemlock.

Rabbi Akiba died a courageous death. He was a Jewish Zealot revolutionary crucified like Jesus by the Romans. He died with the words of the Shema on his lips: *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord [is] our God, the Lord is one”* (Dt 6:4 NIV). He died boldly, believing that in his death he would find freedom.

The Stoic martyrs died stoic deaths, torn to pieces by wild animals in the arena. It was said that they drew unusually large crowds because people were fascinated by their complete lack of emotion at their own deaths. They died, according to one historian, “without terror and without hope.”

The Christian martyr Perpetua died a dignified death. As she went to meet the wild beasts in the arena, she asked for a pin to fasten her hair. She felt it wasn’t proper that a martyr should suffer with her hair a mess, for fear that she should seem to be sad in the hour of her glory. She died with dignity.

Jesus’ death was different. Jesus’ death was anything but a “fine death.” In the Gospel of Mark, we learn about Jesus’ suffering in Gethsemane: *[Jesus] took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them* (Mk 14:33-34 NIV).

When Jesus died on the cross, Mark tells us: *With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last* (Mk 15:37 NIV). The author of Hebrews describes Jesus last days with these words: *During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death* (Heb 5:7 NIV).

Both Matthew and Mark record this anguished scene from the crucifixion: *About the ninth*

hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46 NIV).

The Gospels tell us Jesus died in profound despair. He died feeling abandoned by God. Over time we have tried to soften the harshness of it, but there’s no way to deny the truth. Jesus’ dying was not pretty. He died godforsaken. The only begotten Child of God died without God, without comfort, without meaning. He descended into hell.

Yet this strange religion of ours teaches this – that this most godforsaken of deaths is the precise moment in human history when we see God most clearly. How can this be? What does this mean?

The death of Jesus tells us something about where God chooses to be in our world. It tells us that God chooses to be at the very places that, by all our human senses and assumptions, we assume are most godforsaken. It means that God is in the places of our world where we most assume God isn’t.

Where are the places in our world that we assume God would not frequent? The prisons? The crack houses? Terrorist cells? Nursing homes that smell of death? Bars that smell of alcohol? The house on your block that’s plagued with family violence?

Are we to believe that these kinds of godforsaken places are where God is most present? That these are the places we are most likely to see God? It is hard to imagine.

Can we then assume that this is also true of our personal lives? Might it be that God chooses to be at the very places within us where we feel we are most distant from God? The darkest shadows inside of us where we are the most vile? The buried and repressed stuff? The jealousy and selfishness and out-of-control desires? Those godforsaken places within us that we try to deny to even our own conscience? Can these godforsaken places in you and me be the place of resurrection and new life?

If there is any truth at all to the biblical account of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, then it must mean that in the darkest of times, there is something happening in the darkness that the prince of darkness himself is unable to control. [The Almighty God is there in the darkness. He plants himself in the places that are without a particle of light or a ray of hope.](#)

[If we try to make too much sense out of Good Friday, we run head on into God’s broken wisdom. Good Friday is a confusing day. Martin Luther is said to have sat in his study at his desk for hours on end studying the words – “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” Those who saw him said that he appeared to be a corpse. Finally, he rose from his chair in exasperation and was overheard to say, “God forsaking God! No one can understand that.”](#)

[There are no neat and clean conclusions on Good Friday. No message that a preacher can wrap in a neat package and tie up with a pretty bow. Reason reaches its limits at the](#)

cross of Good Friday. This is a day that, in human terms, makes no sense.

Perhaps it is enough to say that there is no hell that Christ hasn't already visited. So when we find ourselves in our own little hells, we should look for the footprints of Christ and follow them through the hell we are in.

Jesus did not die a good death. He did not die a courageous death. He did not die a stoic death. He did not die a dignified death. He died godforsaken. And somehow that makes us less afraid.