

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"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" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Today, according to the fallen world, the Ten Commandments – *as we heard in today's Old Testament lesson* – seem like foolishness from a time gone by. But they are the wisdom of God for all ages, given in love for the safety of His people. And to each of the Ten Commandments in the *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther teaches over and over and over again to not regard the Commandments as a joke, because they are no joke to God.

To put it into an ever-wider context, to the fallen world, the entire Bible itself is foolishness. Sadly, even many professing Christians would agree with that sentiment. But the Bible is the very Word of God from cover to cover. And through that Bible, the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in the One who is the Savior from sin, eternal death, and the devil.

And in our Gospel lesson, the people selling oxen, sheep and pigeons, along with the money changers in the temple show the foolishness of the people – those who turned God's house into a marketplace.

Then in our text from 1 Corinthians 1, the Holy Spirit inspires St. Paul to write about the word of the cross: ***"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"*** (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The word of the cross is foolishness. It's foolishness for those who are perishing. To these people, the word of the cross makes no sense to them. We all know family, friends, and neighbors, who see the cross of Christ as utter foolishness. A God who comes to this world where everybody hates Him and everybody wants to murder Him, and this God lets them? Why? Because He loves them? To worldly thinkers, this makes no sense. In fact, it's downright foolish. Who would humble Himself to that degree? Who would put Himself into that situation with a bunch of ingrates?

We all know people who truly believe that the cross is foolishness and that you are a fool for confessing your faith in Christ this day. Whenever you speak to a person who believes you are a fool for talking about Christ, you usually get that look. You know that look. The look that says, “This is a waste of time. This is foolishness.”

I have gotten that look more times than I can count and even from close friends and relatives. “You mean, you believe that marriage is only between one man and one woman? You’ve got to be kidding.” “You mean, you believe that the Bible is written by God? You know, it was only written by men.” “You mean, Jesus is the only Savior? You’ve got to be kidding.”

We’ve all been there. The word of the cross is foolishness. It’s foolishness for those who are perishing.

For the Jews, they see the crucifixion of the Messiah as a stumbling block because anyone killed on a cross was cursed. It was scandalous to think that their God was executed as a criminal.

For the Greeks of Paul’s day, the cross is foolishness, absolute nonsense, that displays a senseless act of thinking. It makes no sense. Glory or wisdom or life doesn’t come from a form of execution.

The cross may be foolishness for those who are perishing, but we are to tell those who are perishing about Christ anyway, because they, too, need saving. And we do this telling not through compulsion or threat, but through the Holy Spirit as He leads us through our God-given vocations – *our stations, or callings* – in life as a parent, a child, a sibling, a cousin, employee, teacher, or friend. Now, to those you speak about Jesus, they will think that there is something wrong with you. And there is something wrong. But this problem is not with Jesus or even with the cross. There is something terribly wrong with this world.

You see, ever since Adam and Eve listened to that serpent, we’ve been wired for something different than what God has to offer. So much so, that we think that what God has to offer us is utter foolishness. Our fallen nature says this is naïve. Our fallen nature says that God is just a pipe dream. It’s not worth our time.

What was it that the serpent promised Eve? He promised her wisdom. Wisdom is what Satan was offering her. ***“So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate”*** (Genesis 3:6). The Fall of man. Eve, the helper, usurped Adam’s place as head of the household, and Adam let it all happen. God’s Order of Creation became topsy-turvy; it became upside-down. The Fall happened because of Satan’s promise of wisdom. “You’ll be just like God.”

Wisdom. All you have to do is to set your own agenda, forget God’s Law and everything He has told you, and listen to someone else, which so happens to be Satan. This is the world’s wisdom.

Paul asks, ***“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?”*** (1 Corinthians 1:20).

The fallen world says: Wow them with what you know; wow them with your arguments. It doesn’t even have to be true. Evil is good. Good is evil. Up is down. Down is up. Men can be women. Women can be men. All it needs to be is persuasive. It doesn’t even need to be true. This is the world’s version of wisdom. If you say enough lies, the lies will become all too seductive and replace truth. This worked pretty well with Eve. And Satan knows what he’s talking about. ***“Did God actually say?”*** (Genesis 3:1). With one bite she chose to listen to Satan and his version of wisdom. She ate from the forbidden tree. And she gave that fruit to Adam and he ate.

Only another tree could save Adam and Eve. And this tree would not be any tree in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve would be banished from Eden for their own protection. So, it would have to be another tree. A tree planted thousands of years later outside that Garden. This tree would be the tree of life on which the Son of God would die for what Adam and Eve did so long ago as they brought sin and pride upon creation. Upon that cross, the Son of God would also die for those sins of thought, word, and deed that you and I have done all do recently.

The tree that brought death to our Lord brought life to the world. Upon this tree was nailed Jesus, the Lord of Life, of which we eat every time we come to the Lord’s Supper. We receive the fruit of that tree: the body and blood of our Lord given and shed for you and me for the forgiveness of our sins.

The tree of the cross is truly the tree of life for you and for me and for all who cling to the ***“God who so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”*** (John 3:16). God the Father gave His only-begotten Son on that tree to remedy our sin and rebellion and our chasing after the world’s wisdom.

But again, for those who are perishing, that wondrous cross of which we glory is still embarrassing. It’s nothing but foolishness.

The word of the cross is foolishness for those who are perishing, but we ought not give up on telling others about what Christ’s crucifixion, His bodily resurrection, and His bodily ascension into heaven mean for you and for them. It means that we have salvation and all by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. And that He is still with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20b). For us who are being saved, the word of the cross is not foolish; it is the power of God.

Now, the word of the cross may sound foolish to the worldly wise. We do preach Christ crucified, which is a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but for those who are saved, Christ is ***“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”*** (1 Corinthians 1:24-25). Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +