

I CORINTHIANS 1:18-25

The message about 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 and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.*

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, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

UPSIDE DOWN

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Sometimes it's good to be Upside Down. Children love to be held by their heels and swung in circles. When my father was in flight training for the Great War, one of the drills they had to execute was to fly Upside Down to help orient them to doing belly rolls and other evasive maneuvers. I go Upside Down on my inversion table which offers me many health benefits. If you are unfamiliar with an inversion table, it is a mechanically simple, but very inventive device that allows you to safely hang Upside Down. You simply insert your feet onto the foot rest, clamp them down and then use the handles to push yourself into an inverted position. (It can hold 260 pounds so I'm good.) I do this twice a day for three minutes.

What are the benefits of hanging Upside Down? you might ask. First of all, it's very relaxing and allows you to get a telescopic view of your ceiling and a close up encounter with your floor and wall. But second, and more importantly, it allows the blood to flow from your lower extremities flooding your upper organs and brain. It also drains the synovial fluid from your bone and tendon connections which is very good for your joints and helps to pull your lower back into alignment. And then, when you swing

back into upright position, all the blood returns re-oxygenating your upper organs and legs.

Going Upside Down gives you an entirely different perspective. And that is exactly what Paul is asking his congregants in the Corinthian church to do. We are all seeking something in our life that will give us direction in our worldviews, our approaches to living every day, how we regard and treat other people, particularly those we disagree with. And we all settle upon what we have determined are basic truths to guide us. Over time, these truths become deeply rooted and resistant to being yanked out and examined. They have become our guides religiously, politically, and socially. They tend to get engraved in stone. So, we don't like to have them challenged.

But in Lent, when our focus is on self-examination, we must confess that our worldviews and biases heavily favor ourselves. They're kind of gerrymandered if you know what I mean. We take care of ourselves and sometimes take care of others on the margins. And there is ample cultural support to affirm this is how to successfully live our lives which is at the heart of consumerism which drives our economy. And what is more important to Americans than our economy? Just look at the polls on how we will vote. (Ronald Reagan said, "It's the economy, Stupid!"). It is

self-preservation. It is our way of life. It is a major source of our feelings of self-worth. How deep do the roots go? Money is power. The more you have, the more you have.

This is the wisdom of the world of which Paul speaks in his first letter to the church in Corinth. And when you read the passage, you can see there is a considerable amount of tension within the congregation. Which is understandable given that the early church was drawing members from diverse religious traditions. There were both Jews and Greeks.

Remember that Jesus was a Jew and most of his followers were raised in the Judaic tradition and followed the Torah. And many Greeks were coming from the Hellenistic Wisdom traditions. Socrates and Plato preceded Jesus by about 400 years. Their approaches to life were deeply ingrained in Greek Culture. These formed their operational beliefs.

Needless to say, the traditions of both Greeks and Jews brought valuable lessons to the table of life. But they parted company on many issues. So, the seeds of conflict within the church were well fertilized. And now Paul has superseded their belief systems informing them they are both missing the point when it comes to what Christ brought to the world. The Cross changed everything. *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 the world, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. In other words, with Christ, God has turned everything Upside Down. For following the Law was the Jews' path to righteousness. The Greeks either tried to curry favor with the many deities they worshipped who demanded adoration and sacrificial gifts; or if they were disciples of Socrates or Plato, they pursued systems of wisdom and logic to center their lives around.

In either case, Paul took on the unenviable task of turning their belief systems Upside Down. And don't we also need to check the driving forces in our lives? Because the core of the Christian message is self-sacrifice of which the Cross is the very symbol. That is where true power lies and this is not the way of the world. The world is focused on dominance. It is focused on protecting our privileges. It is focused on winning by whatever means necessary to conquer our enemies.

So what do you think? Shall we go Upside Down and take stock of ourselves by looking honestly in the mirror at what drives us? This is the challenge of our Lenten journey. Look closely. You may be surprised by

what you see.

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