

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
Dr. Jonathan Dent
The Wisdom of Foolishness

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7th Sunday after Epiphany

I've been talking a lot lately about foolishness. This isn't really because I don't have anything else to talk about. It's because Paul uses foolishness as a way to think about wisdom. Now on the internet you will be led to understand that foolishness is a lack of wisdom whereas stupidity is a lack of intelligence. Intelligence doesn't necessarily help you get wise. In fact, intelligence can block the way to wisdom because you think you know, when in fact you have much to learn.

This is particularly true as we come face to face with God. If we already think we know what we need or don't need from God, then how can we expect to encounter the truth which may be surprising and outside the realm of our expectations, if we are indeed open to the truth. At this point, let me share that someone in a group I was in this week had heard that wisdom was an acronym: waiting-in-silence; discerning our motivations or motives. And certainly if we can stand silence, some of us really can't stand silence for any length of time, then we can consider what our real motives and motivations are as we consider our lives and relationships.

Self-knowledge cannot be taught at the university. They might give you some tools, but cannot tell you who you are inside. We need to know who we are. This is in part why John Calvin began his classic *The Institutes of the Christian Religions*, the first chapter was exploring this very subject. He named that chapter "the knowledge of God and of ourselves is mutually connected." We come to God as we desire to know ourselves. We come to understand ourselves as we truly come to know God.

Someone else this week said that if you don't have a reason or an issue, some addiction or a problem that draws you to God, then go out and find one. The journey and the recovery are worth it. The Corinthians didn't have to go out and find problems, they were living them. So Paul tries to address their issues by putting a greater perspective on God's work in their lives. In so doing, he also put a greater perspective on our lives, as well, all of us who want to listen.

Paul uses two metaphors in the second half of chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians. He uses the metaphor or picture of building a house. Now how many of you have ever built your own house? I don't mean that you had it built for you, but actually did all the work yourself? Anyone?

There's an awful lot that goes into building a house. The first thing is finding the property, making sure there is water, and a place for a septic tank or sewer hook up. Some people like electricity and telephone, although cell phones have changed that. You need to look on the lot or acreage for a place to build a house that is the size you want it to be. Then as you place it on the property, you need to know if the ground it is to be set in, is suitable, not boggy, not full of underground springs or other water sources. Then you have to determine if you want a basement whether you will have the equipment to dig through the rock or whether you will need to blast.

Placing your house upon the rock is much smarter than on the sand, as Jesus would note in his teaching. If the sand moves, the foundation can move and the house can literally fall down. Paul says the foundation work is the critical work in building a house. If the foundation is off, askew, tilted, the house will be off similarly. If the foundation is not solid, the house is in danger. You really do trust the builder when you have someone build a house for you.

This was particularly evident in the earthquakes in the '70s in S. California. I lived through those earthquakes and saw the freeway overpasses with reinforced concrete toppled. This means they thought the foundation was secure, but in fact it wasn't built to withstand an earthquake of 7 or more on the Richter scale.

So Paul tells us our foundation in our faith, in our relationship to God, in our spirituality is critical. What is the foundation of your faith, of your spirituality? Of course, we often sing "Jesus Christ is made the firm foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone." But Paul wants to make sure we know that our foundation, the footings for our spiritual house, are rock solid in Jesus. We should have no doubts about the fact that Jesus himself has laid the foundation for our spiritual houses, with a material we could not provide that lasts forever. We trust him as the Rock beneath all we do and say.

Then Paul goes on to say that we must choose how we build our houses, once we acknowledge and begin building upon the relationship with Jesus Christ as our foundation. Once we have said yes to the Lord and no to sin and rebellion. Then we can choose what we build the rest of our lives, and with what materials we are building. We can choose materials that last in the midst of the firestorm to come, such as gold, silver and costly stones. Where we choose to spend our lives, in the service of others, in the building up of God's way in the community. Or we can be engaged in building our own kingdoms, our own reputation, being mostly concerned with possessions, power, popularity, pomp and mainly just ourselves rather than what God wants. These are the things thieves can steal and liars can manipulate. These are the hay, wood and stubble in the firestorm. They do not last.

But what we give away we can keep, and no one can take it from us. Lives given in the service of the Lord, in compassion, justice, truth, honesty, recovery, life-giving, building up, drawing others to the One who has drawn us to himself. This cannot be taken away or burned.

But much of what we worry about here and now will burn in the end. Have you been to those funerals where the most the family can say about the deceased is that they were great at cards, or golf or skiing or they loved their automobiles, their motorcycles, or their skidoos. Now there's nothing wrong with any of these things, but if that was all the family could come up with, what does that say about that individual's life? I've had these funerals over the years and I get profoundly sad. I'm not God. I'm not condemning them.

I'm just wondering out loud with you about the nature of the building materials you are using in making your life wonderfully full of God and full of God's transformational power. Because the second metaphor is more about what kind of building is being built on that foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

You and I are the building which could have been a residential home, a single family dwelling, a condo, a row house, a mansion, a skyscraper, an office building, a restaurant, a shopping mall, a museum, you name it. But surprisingly, the building every believer turns out to be is a temple.

Now you know that a temple is a place where a person goes to worship. It is where the deity resides. The temple is holy. "Holy" means "completely set apart for one purpose: worshipping God and enjoying God forever."

Paul goes even farther with this metaphor or picture. He says we ought to treat our physical bodies like temples, not desecrating them with neglect, or with information or activities which would not be appropriate for a place of worship. This means we need to work on the maintenance and upkeep of our bodies as we would our church building, or even better. We need to realize that we have a one-time physical existence in this life with a focus: housing God's presence.

The Holy Spirit is resident in us where we have invited Jesus into our lives. God dwells within us. That's something to meditate on. Do you and I live our lives as others come to us and as we go to them, recognizing that we are in the midst of God's residence? I don't think much about this, but need to do so more. I am blown away but the wonder of actually being the body of Christ, the arms and legs, the actions and words of God for the community. Paul will get to this teaching later on.

Meanwhile he simply says to remember the difference between what we have been talking about above, and what the world counts important. The world sees this as foolishness, but for you who believe, this is true wisdom. The world sees this as stupidity, but you know better. So when you are tempted to thinking you have to be cool or "with it" or "wicked" or whatever the current words are, remember what really counts is inside.

You have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the all-surpassing power is from God and not from ourselves. That's Second Corinthians 4. You are standing on holy ground.

Let us consider anew who we are, what we are here for, and what we are doing. Let us consider all the above, particularly in light of the Annual meeting next Sunday after worship, as we seek to be the people and the work of God here in this place.

Let us pray.