

SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe.

I think Paul just called me foolish. Or that preaching a sermon is foolish. I've felt pretty foolish this week as I've wrestled with these texts.

It shouldn't be difficult to preach on these particular passages...

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

It so poetically and beautifully describes the kingdom of God, the kingdom that Jesus came to institute and proclaim. It certainly doesn't feel that complicated. Micah describes what God asked of the people of Israel – even as they prove they don't know how to do it.

Jesus follows up on those prophetic words to declare exactly what the kingdom of God looks like...a place where the peaceful, the merciful, the gentle (perhaps a better way to hear the word "meek"), the poor in spirit, the mournful...are the ones who are blessed. Those are the characteristics of what the reign of God looks like.

"The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing"

The truth of these passages is that they are foolish by any measurement of success in the world around us. And I've felt like a fool this week as I try to reconcile these words of gospel truth with the reality of how unbelievably difficult the world is.

I will confess to you all that I was grateful for snow last weekend – not because I wanted to stay home on a Sunday morning, but because I didn't have to respond immediately to the events of Saturday. As I stood in this place on Saturday morning recording a message to be shared the next day, a second citizen of this country had just been shot and killed in Minneapolis. Shot by federal agents.

Now, before anyone gets any ideas, yes, that was a political statement, using the definition of political that is "relating to the government or the public affairs of a country." It was also a simple statement of fact. Federal agents shot and killed Alex Patti. I'm not

bringing that up to offer some **partisan** message about what's happening in the world. I bring it up because I want you to hold what is happening in the world up to the gospel, to God's Word, written and living.

There's a lot of bluster about the ideals of our nation and there are many who are trying to form it to their specific ideology – on both sides. But it begs the question of what ideals we should be built on. There are those who would proclaim that we live in a Christian nation – and I vehemently disagree as a matter of history. But I also disagree with the message the nation they are trying to establish that they choose to label "Christian."

What does it mean to be Christian? What does it mean to proclaim the kingdom of God?

The words we hear today are conspicuously lacking in that conversation. People of a certain political ideology have pushed for there to be prayer in schools and to post the Ten Commandments. Why aren't we posting the beatitudes? Why aren't we posting a message of peace and mercy?

The kingdom of God rejects the power of this world. The kingdom of God is not about enforcing the ten commandments with a 9mm. Over and over and over again, the message of God in Jesus Christ is to step away from power and choose love. The blessings of the Sermon on the Mount cannot be seen any other way.

I don't understand how that message has become so foreign to those who claim to follow Jesus. I watch the actions of those who profess to be Christian and just don't understand what they hear in the Word of God. How did we end up in a time when someone can carry the cross, the symbol of God's willingness to die for love, while committing acts of violence?

Of course, we've always been that way. We've always twisted the cross and God's love to fit our own worldview. And then used it to perpetrate acts of power and violent control.

It all feels so foolish. It all feels like we keep losing the plot. We keep losing the image of the kingdom that Jesus so clearly offers.

But here we are. Foolishly continuing to proclaim love in the face of violence. But I don't know what else to do. Walking humbly in today's world means continuing to take care of those we encounter, continuing to seek to understand, continuing to believe that God's love is real when the world calls us foolish.

Walter Brueggemann, a renowned biblical scholar, said, “‘walking humbly,’ in contrast to strutting, is to pay attention to the other, ...that is, to recognize that on the path with me are others from whom one receives one’s identity.” I think there’s power in that definition of identity. There are some who are so intent on determining the identity of this country on their personal ideology and interpretation of history. And in doing that, they’ve lost the way we walk together – the way we are formed by those we walk with.

Formed, in God’s love, by those we show mercy, those with whom we do justice, those who seek the cross instead of the sword. Amen.