

Year A Lent 3- the foolishness of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The message of the cross seems foolish to those who are lost and dying. But it is God's power to us who are being saved. It is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of those who are wise.

I will do away with the cleverness of those who think they are so smart."

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where are the great thinkers of our time? Hasn't God made the wisdom of the world foolish? God wisely planned that the world would not know him through its own wisdom. It pleased God to use the foolish things we preach to save those who believe. Jews require signs. Greeks look for wisdom. But we preach about Christ and his death on the cross. That is very hard for Jews to accept. And everyone else thinks it's foolish. But there are those God has chosen, both Jews and Greeks. To them Christ is God's power and God's wisdom. The foolish things of God are wiser than human wisdom. The weakness of God is stronger than human strength.



I stood in a line, in Rome, for 2 hours just to see this picture for 2 minutes.

I remember my Greek teach raving about it – so I thought I should go and see it.

It is supposed to be the earliest picture (graffiti) of Jesus ever – and even so it's a mockery.

The good thing to me is that the kids of that day are doing graffiti of Jesus – for me it confirms Jesus died on a cross.

We pin our entire faith on the fact that Jesus, son of God, true God, died on a cross for us – no other religion can accept that God would die for his people – they say that's foolishness.

Every other religion expects the people to die for their God – not that God would die for the people.

You can see Jesus on the cross with a donkey's head.

It says (Alexamenos Cebete Theon) "Alexamenos worships God".

Is his picture a mockery or a statement – you know these "artist" give us an insight to what people are thinking.

Are you offended by this?

Are you intrigued?

Paul says to us today: *The message of the cross is foolishness but it is the power to save.*

He says the way to convince those who would become Christians is to be foolish?.

Foolishness – or at least what the world sees as foolish - is the power of salvation??

To love someone who doesn't know love – is the power of salvation.

I spoke to the kindy kids during the week about Zach.

In their kids' bibles Zac is called “nasty little cheat”.

Nobody liked Zach – people avoided Zach – he was a bully – he twisted people's arms for money – Zach didn't have a friend in the world.

One day Zach wanted to see Jesus – so he climbed a tree – so he could see Jesus in the crowd – he thought Jesus wouldn't want to see him.

You know the story – of all the important people in the crowd – Jesus looked straight up at Zach in the tree and said “Zach I want to go to your home tonight – I want to eat with you, I want to hang around with you, I want to be your friend.

Imagine what the people thought of Jesus – he's foolish – here I am right here – I am respectable – and he walks past me to Zach – Zach of all people.

This is where we are at – preaching and living what seems to be a foolish message.

This is why I always say – if it makes sense it's of man – if it doesn't make sense it's of God

(I discovered this my self – it's never let me down – I should say it in Latin and make it official hey!)

We deserve death and we receive love and grace and forgiveness – it doesn't make sense.

We deserve death – we get death – that makes sense.

The God of Grace is not like that.

Parents always buy the naughty boy a new bike for Christmas – don't they?

Thats spoiling the kid isn't it?

The next year when he's wrecked the bike he gets another one - bigger and better – true??

Thats spoiling the kid isn't it? That's foolish isn't it?

That's also grace – giving something to someone that doesn't deserve it .

Being a friend to Zach – who doesn't deserve it – there's power in that.

Paul says it's the power of salvation.

That's why God doesn't makes sense. He gives us love and forgiveness and expects noting in return.

That's the way it is with these little kids being baptised today – he forgives their sins before they even sin – crazy love isn't it.

Paul is talking to the Corinthians – a tough lot – so intelligent and advanced, so affluent (or effluent as Kimmy says).

Are we any different?

Paul wants to introduce Jesus to these people.

We want to introduce Jesus to our people.

To break down that intelligence and affluence – Paul loves the unlovable.

Paul even describes the conversion – it's like someone has put hot coals on their head – they are confused - Nobody loves me and now this Christian is loving me and serving me – what's going on?

When Jesus comes into people's lives things change.

People share, and give, and help people they would not have even spoken to before.

The symbol of death is now the symbol of life.

We heard the 10 commandments – 10 laws demanded by God – bad news if you can't obey them.

But if you're honest you will confess a failure on everyone of them.

The Gospel is that Jesus took our failures to the cross.

Jesus says "I have fulfilled all the law for you".

Talk about spoiling the kids.

It doesn't seem fair – I sin – I get covered with Jesus' righteousness and I'm right for heaven.

And I'm guessing the more sinful and guilty a person is, the more this sounds like the good news.

The Gospel is crazy:

It's instinctive for us people to want to impress – we like to impress women and men, bosses, business partners – and for those who have a spiritual dimension we want to impress God.

Jesus says, "I have come to serve and not be served".

Absolute foolishness: "I don't have to do anything, I don't have to impress him, and the God of this world serves me and dies for me???"

This is rest for my soul?

Most of the commentary says that Alexamenos is a naughty boy – mocking Jesus. I wonder, could he be saying that everything about Jesus is upside down – a humiliated son on a cross is God.

Could it be that this picture is a powerful truth that: "Eternal life is offered to us as a gift by a condemned criminal who paid our debt and took on our sin and made us right for heaven".

Could it be Alexamenos is showing the offense of the cross.

The offense is that my sin is on Jesus on the cross.

The gospel is that my sin is on Jesus on the cross.

For our eyes the cross is loving kindness, it's grace, it's mercy and forgiveness.

Most people don't know what it means.

Paul asks us to learn the cross – to love the cross:

Greater love has no one than to lay down his life for the people he loves.

, "...know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

(Galatians 6:14), *"...may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."*

I don't have a problem with Alexamenos' graffiti.

I like to think Alexamenos is telling us something about Jesus – he was there at the time.

Is says "Alexamenos worships God"

Just next to this graffiti there is another one, it says "Alexamenos fidellis" –

Alexamenos has faith.

- A foolish donkey on the cross – can it be any more offensive? It can't.
- God on the cross – can it be anymore foolish? It can't.
- God on a cross can it be any more powerful? It can't

- The call to mission in Murray Bridge is to serve and not be served, to give, to forgive, to turn the other cheek – is there anything weaker – there isn't.

- Is it the power of the Gospel – the mighty power of salvation – it is.

If our Good Friday service is nice and peasant, please complain.

If it's not offensive and foolish – please complain.

God's ways are not our ways: It pleased God to use the foolish things we preach to save those who believe.

Be fools.

Lord we live and breathe your word, your will, your ways which are an affront to very wise and worldly person. Be with us as we reveal you in what they perceive as weakness – especially serving and forgiving the people of this area. Amen.