

What's The Fuss About?

L-3B-09

1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

3-15-09

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 ¹⁸ For 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. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ 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? ²¹ 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. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

John 2:13-22 ¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

How do you like to be called a "***Fool?***" If you are here today as a *serious spiritual seeker*, then you could become a likely candidate to be named a **fool**. Someone recently wrote me that he rejects everything that I

believe and stand for. He doesn't believe in the work or the message of the church. He also and maybe rightly at this point believes that the church is too judgmental and hypocritical. In his eyes I am a stupid, illogical, fool. I viewed a film recently, *Religulous*. "Politically provocative talk show host [Bill Maher](#) skewers the current state of organized religion in this documentary that derives its title from a blend of the words "**religion**" and "**ridiculous**." Making stops in Jerusalem, the Vatican and other holy destinations, Maher travels the world to talk to believers from a variety of faiths to find out why they're so sure their religion is right -- and why they're so certain others are wrong." (Description from Netflix.com) In presenting this humorous but serious film, Maher pokes holes in our sacred misplaced personal beliefs and hypocritical actions. In his book, *Crazy for God*, Frank Schaeffer, son of the famous defender of fundamental conservative religion of the 20th century, reveals the dark underside of his famous father and mother, whose home in Labris, Switzerland, were friends with politicians, entertainers, artists and famous conservative religious TV evangelists such as Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell as well as a host of other evangelical writers and speakers. Schaeffer's autobiographical account of his life is startling and scandalizing to those who would hold these public religious figures as untouchable servants of God. He recounts his father's

abuse of his mother, leaving marks on her body from a fight upstairs in their bedroom and then coming downstairs to pontificate his ideas of biblical interpretation and values. To young Frank this left him with a strange disconnect with truth and reality, perceived and experienced.

Is it any wonder, then, that there is such skepticism of Christian faith as practiced in our churches. The recent ARIS (American Religious Identification Survey) reports that many in this country would agree because there is an increase in people today over eighteen years ago who do not believe in God as presented in organized religion in churches, temples or mosques. “The percentage of people who **call themselves** in some way **Christian** has **dropped more than 11%** in a generation.” (USA Today, 3-09-09) Believing is becoming more commonly accepted as **foolish**. All other faiths are also either declining or just remaining static. So, our culture is becoming more and more **cynical** about God and the way in which believers use and witness their faith. What do you think of that – true or not?

At the heart of today’s scripture in 1 Corinthians is a ***Gospel of Foolishness***. The actions of Jesus in the Temple were acts that seemed dangerous and contrary to the customs of the religious practices of the Temple and to those who were the gatekeepers, the religious purists. Jesus was acting foolishly to the establishment, wouldn’t you say? His actions

revealed a different face of God from the **meek and mild Jesus**, accepting and gracious God we so often preach in church. In the Temple we see a man who is **angry** at the things going on in the Temple. And in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke this **single act** may be the *tipping event* that leads to the arrest and execution of Jesus. Why, we may wonder, would this be the **single act** that became *the straw that broke the camel's back*? Could it be because he disturbed the sacred places and practices of mind and heart and threatened to undo the whole premise of Temple worship? His actions deserved a reaction from leaders. The Temple was everything to the Jewish faith. Jesus was a Jew who observed the laws and told us that we should not discard the laws, but look at them in a new way that builds up and causes us to love not hate or hurt. The Temple was burning sacrifices 24/7 52 weeks a year. People came from everywhere for the festivals, such as the Passover in today's scripture. This is the glorious Temple where a million people came, many desiring to sacrifice to God but without a proper sacrifice. Since Roman money could not be used inside the Temple grounds, because it had the image of the emperor whom the Romans considered a god, the people

had to exchange their money for temple coins to buy the sacrificial animals.



This practice of money changing in the “Court of the Gentiles” left it vulnerable to corruption, cheating and oppression to the poor and to women. They were at the mercy of the money changers to obtain a proper sacrifice required of them.

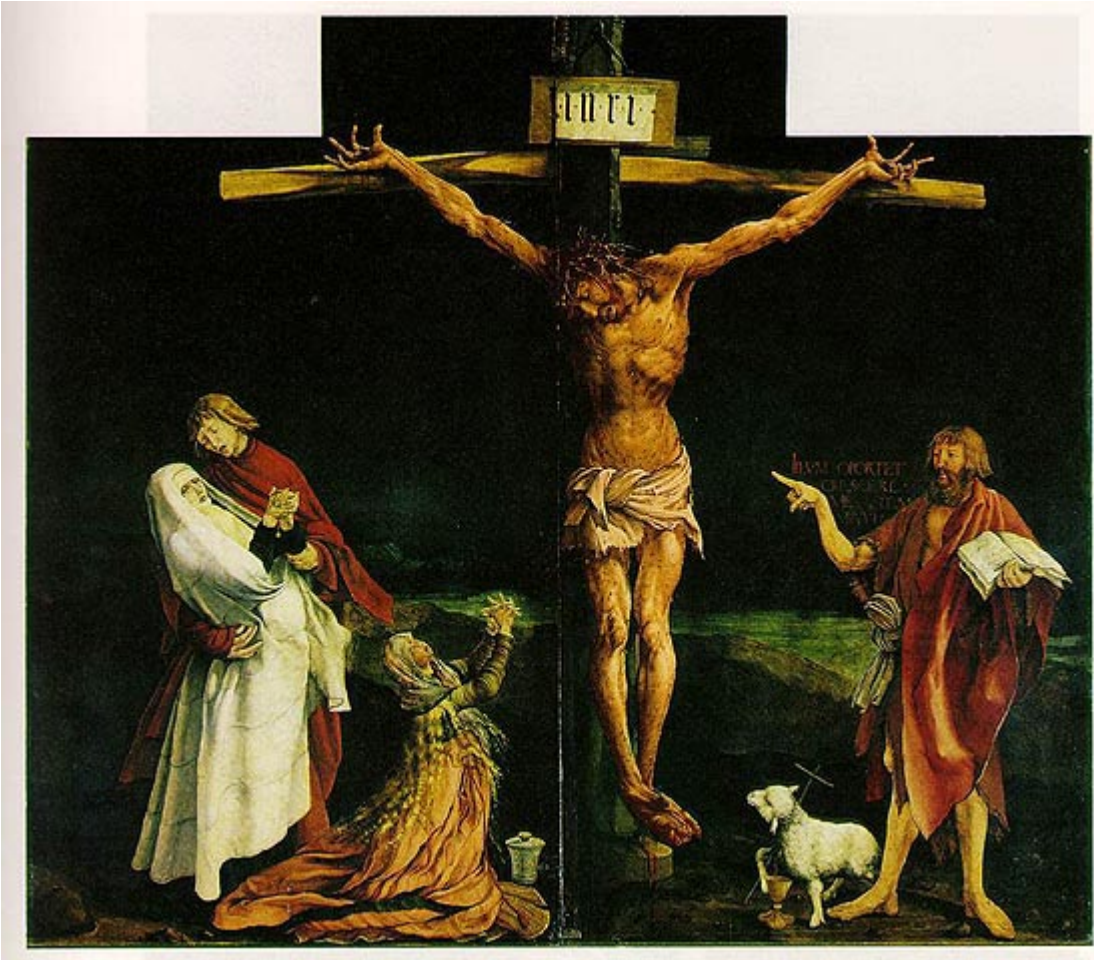
The Romans destroyed this sacred Temple in 70 CE, leaving only a reminder of what would happen again, if the Jewish people revolted. What remains is this “western wailing wall”

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Since we are in the days of Lent, we all know what this reaction ultimately would mean – death on a Roman Cross, as ugly as it could be. I want you to look at the portrayal of Jesus on the Cross in Matthias Grunewald’s Eisenheim Altar Piece. This is the end result of a skeptic’s

revenge.



Kill the messenger, some believe, and you can also kill the message.

The picture of this tortured head of Jesus on the cross was hung above the desk of the most famous theologian of the 20th century – Karl Barth. The words in Latin written above the outstretched arm and finger pointing to the crucified Jesus read, “He must increase, I must decrease.”

Is Jesus an extremist that should be feared, tortured, driven out to the executioner’s hill? Certainly, he was cheered as he entered his ministry three

years earlier and later on his Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem, only to find these jeers and threats and betrayals, abandonment, false charges, and scourging, and finally the cross to bear. Jesus reveals a depth of **passion** that may seem to lack compassion when he forms his whip of cords and drives out the money changers. In no other passage does Jesus demonstrate the **depth of righteous indignation and pure white anger** and displeasure as



he does here. Had it all come down to this?

Or has Jesus brought about a **new age** and a **new kingdom** where values and worship **turn the world upside down**? After his resurrection, when his followers fervently spread the Gospel to Gentiles, they were accused of turning the world upside down! Certainly, Jesus had begun the true story of the **seven last words of a dying church** – “*We have always done it that*

way.” Nothing scares the world more than a person who is going to change everything. It is said that his role as savior and our role as proclaimers of his message that the Kingdom of God has come near and his life’s brief witness is to *comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable*. Jesus did that without question. Even the Temple was challenged, the most sacred place in the heart and minds of the worshipping community. What would replace this holy place? What’s this fuss all about anyway?

This is a place to raise a flag of caution. Following Jesus can be misunderstood. Following our own brand of fervor for Jesus can be as wrong and as damaging as slander and libel that can ruin the soul of another person forever. The history of the church has been strewn with the wreckage of such extremism of the followers of Christ. Personal ambition and national pride cannot be allowed to justify any acts that destroy rather than build up. We should not forget the Crusades or the genocide of North and South American Indians in the guise of conversion, or the **holocaust** of WW II where **German extremists** used an image of purity of race with Christian overtones that damaged millions of Jews. That same image is used today by **Neo-Nazis** and **White Supremacists**. Nor can we forget how people used Christ to commit suicide or mass murder – the saga of over 700 people taking their lives while following the **Rev. Jim Jones**, a Disciple of Christ

pastor at his People's Temple on November 18, 1978 death of over 900 Temple members in [Jonestown, Guyana](#) along with the deaths of nine other people at a nearby airstrip and in [Georgetown](#).

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Jones); or can we easily forget the carnage that resulted in the fires of David Koresh and his followers in Waco Texas?

Extremism, religious zeal, and misplaced national allegiance are wrong and destructive, dangerous and hypocritical. There is **no excuse** for human barbarity or arrogance that **excludes** all God's children rather than including them into the vast arms of God's grace that stretch forth from the Cross to embrace humanity with hope and life.

We should **pause in our journey** of Lent to **examine** our own life's journey of belief and actions. We should **confess** our sin of hurting others in the name of something we call sacred. My son said to me recently as we discussed some horrible happenings coming out of the mouths of religiously popular icons. He said (and I agree) that God expects us to bear good fruits in our life. This is the true measure of faithfulness - *to love God and to love our neighbor*. To do otherwise is to become the source of Christ's passion and righteous indignation for acts of hypocrisy and idolatry.

Let's ask ourselves today, "*What would disturb Jesus if he came into our midst?*" I suspect that he would be concerned deeply about any **judgmental thoughts that lead to acts** of ridicule, exclusion, or shunning of others. Who might these others be and why would we be this way? We might well need to examine our attitudes toward those who do not dress or act or smell clean like us. Should a person be made to feel unwelcome or receive a disapproving look of disgust because of their dress? Should a person be made to feel **judged and excluded** because they haven't been around here for 40 or 50 years or because they sit in your sacred private seat? Should we be considering what our whispers and our slandering of another's character is all about? Sometimes we can just be **downright nasty and rude** in public with our righteous disapproval of whatever we don't like. Should we be concerned that we would rather **take care of ourselves first**, and then look to helping others second or third, or if there is something left over to share? Should we be concerned that Jesus might overturn our sacred images and icons that we deem more important than he? Do we hold some furniture and some chairs and tables, rooms or space as religiously sacred and that no one should dare to question? Where does Jesus come into our midst and overturn our sacred customs and actions?

These scenes of Jesus in the Temple, overturning tables and being confronted by the authorities, raises up a modern question for us now as to the religious folks then – “by what authority does Jesus have to enter into our sacred places and disturb tradition and ritual so much”? This is a time to ask these questions. This is a time to look at the folly of Christ and the wisdom of God, his willingness to die and to bring about new life and much needed change. This is a time to be sincere and to confess our narrow vision and our rigid ways that do not welcome but send deadly messages of unwelcome.

This is the time to confess our sin. This is God’s time to transform and raise us up to the Kingdom life of Christ, whose journey to the cross we remember not with nostalgia but with the power of God’s holy presence working for good among us today. What do you think of this Jesus in our temple today? *What’s the fuss all about?* You and I might be tempted to say, “*Leave well enough alone!*” Right?