

## **Fourth Sunday after Epiphany February 2, 2020**

### **1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

St. John Lutheran Church was officially organized on March 2, 1856 almost exactly 164 years ago today. In those 164 years this church has seen some ups and downs. I've heard the stories of the hard times, when decisions were made about what bills to pay and when. Times when it seemed foolish to even consider keeping the doors open.

And yet, the members of this assembly of the Body of Christ remained faithful and persevered. Gathering each week around Word and Sacrament, caring for each other and their neighbors with love, and continuing to look to the future that God had laid before them. Laying both a literal and figurative foundation upon which their children and grandchildren could build.

We can be thankful for these ancestors in the faith. For their trust that God would provide what they needed which allowed them to be generous in their support of this congregation. For their vision for the future of the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We can be thankful that in so many ways, they were foolish. Foolish enough to believe that even before there was a town of 200, there could be an assembly of believers. Foolish enough to be generous with

their own money in tough times so that this place of worship would continue to exist. Foolish enough to believe in a future that God would provide for. Foolish enough to believe that the good news of God's love for all of us in Jesus Christ was worth it.

The apostle Paul in his First letter to the Corinthians is writing to a community that struggled to define its identity as the church of God in a complex and sophisticated urban setting. The church was made up of members who grew up Jewish and Gentile, who came from different social backgrounds. This led to tensions, as the groups within the church in Corinth tended to define themselves by their differences rather than their common life.

In response to this, Paul reminds them of what unites them, the message of Jesus Christ, and him crucified. A message that is foolishness. Even more so today if you think about it. That God would come as a human being. Even more so that this Divine/Human one would be willing to suffer at the hands of those who have been created by God. To die an agonizing death on the cross, so that we might be saved from the very thing that put Jesus on that cross. Our sin, our belief that we can be God, the we know what is best in this world.

This message is foolish enough to proclaim that three days after Jesus' brutal death, he was raised again. Proving that with God, even death doesn't stand a chance.

Paul reminds them that unlike most things in this world, God doesn't need the powerful, the wealthy, the well-known, the smartest to achieve God's purpose. Look around, he says. How many of you are wise by human standards? How many of you are of noble birth? How many of you are powerful and influential in this world?

Look around you, my siblings in Christ, at the diversity that makes up St. John. Those whose families goes back 164 years in this community and those who moved in a few years ago. Those who are native to Iowa and those of us who have moved from other places. Take a look – how many of us were born into wealth and power? How many of us have PhD's? How many of us are social influencers?

And yet, as Paul reminds us, "God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe."

This is the calling to which we have been called, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor enough to risk our foolish proclamation. That through it, we might save those who believe.

And who is our proclamation for? Everyone, for certain, but in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us who this Gospel affects most; those poor in spirit who believe there is no hope, the meek, those who mourn, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted.

For even as we are not amongst those who people would call the powerful, the wise, the mighty, our message is for all those who recognize their own brokenness, their own unworthiness, their own falling short. And that includes us.

It has been my privilege to minister to and with you all for three years. I cannot say how many times I have seen the ways in which you serve, heard the stories of how you love your fellow human beings, been humbled by your generosity and thought, “How did I ever get this lucky.” I may not always say it or show it like I ought, but I love each and everyone of you my dear siblings in Christ.

And so, as we begin our 165<sup>th</sup> year of existence as an assembly of believers, as we gather today around that which saves us, the Word proclaimed and the Meal shared, may all of this be food for the journey and encouragement for this year of ministry. That we might be God’s hands and feet in Ely, and Solon, and Mt. Vernon, and Shueyville now and forever.