

Holy Fools

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Good Morning Church Family,

It's good to see you all this morning, I look forward to this time all week.

Every culture, every society, every group of people has something called Cultural Norms. The expectations or rules about how people will live, dress, behave, etc. Often these rules are unspoken, not clearly laid out anywhere, they are woven into the fabric of life. Most people ``know" that you shouldn't dress in hot pink when attending a funeral. Most people know that domino's pizza isn't served on white tablecloth occasions. Sometimes we only know that we've broken a rule, or that we haven't met an expectation until we've already done the thing. And it can leave us feeling embarrassed, foolish, or that we don't quite fit. Those Jr. High and High School years can be a prime example of this- the definition of what is normal or acceptable is so narrow, and the social consequences of not fitting in can be swift and intense.

Okay, now let's recognize that some norms are a bit silly, the world won't end if you eat pizza on a white tablecloth. Nobody is harmed in that instance. This week was Pink Day at the kids' schools, where kids and staff are encouraged to wear pink clothes as a symbol of anti-bullying. The backstory of Pink Day is that there was a boy in the states

who often wore pink to school and was bullied because of it, eventually pink day became a symbol/event to promote kindness and talk about bullying in schools. I explained this backstory to the kids, and Junia said, "That's dumb! Mark is a boy and wears pink to school all the time and it looks great!" I agreed that it was dumb, colours can be for anyone. But she was bumping up against a social norm, the idea that certain colors are feminine and certain are masculine.

While some social norms are silly, some are harmful or toxic. That more is always better. That rest is something we need to earn. The land is a source of resources and income generation That is weak to ask for help. That the problems of our global neighbors are their problems-not ours. These are examples of ways of seeing the world that aren't silly; they're down right damaging; harming people, the land, and relationships. And yet, those ideas are accepted in our culture, those worldviews often undergird the way "the world works" . There is a notion that "that's just how things are" as though these ideas are inherent, are set in stone.

Throughout human history, we have often derided or even punished those who dared to imagine that another world was possible, that another way of living, loving and being was possible. I think of Rosa Parks, the African American woman, who is often credited with kicking off the civil rights movements in the southern United States when she refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white person. That's just how it was done, that's how the world worked, white people were given the first option, the best choices. Or I think of Indigenous Land Claims here in Saskatchewan. I spoke with an Indigenous

Journalist for an article that I wrote for the last issue of Canadian Mennonite about land claims in Saskatchewan. He said that when the legislation was passed saying that the government in Saskatchewan needed to provide land to first nations who had not been given the share of land that they had promised when the treaties were signed, he heard many people, "What do Indians know about owning land?" What do they know about extracting resources, about getting the most economic bang for their buck? What good is land if you're just holding ceremonies on it? Some would say that Rosa Parks was foolish for giving up her seat. Some would say that Indigenous People are foolish for how they treat the land, for their efforts to bring back the Buffalo to the prairies. It can be seen as Foolish to try to live into something better, something more just, more loving, and more peaceful.

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul is talking about in his letter to the Church at Corinth, how the beauty of the Gospel, the power of the Risen Jesus, and the life that his Church is being called to live together doesn't make sense to a world that is broken, that is awaiting full healing and redemption. " 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? 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. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the

wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.”

We're going to jump way back now in the Biblical Narrative to the Creation Story, specifically to life in the Garden of Eden. God formed all of creation- the light from the dark, the sea from the land, the plants, and the animals and Adam and Eve. It was perfect. There was communion, deep relationship, between all things to one another, and all things with God. I think sometimes, because of the emphasis that is placed on the Fall, or the entrance of Sin into the Garden, we miss how deeply good things were in that time. There was no shame. There was no fight for power or struggle for dominance, there was peace, there was relationship, there was true communion in Eden. When sin and death entered the picture the landscape changed. Power struggles, dominance, violence and broken relationships began to mark the stories of relationships between people and creation. And God yearned to restore all things to the vision of Eden.

The trajectory of God's restoration comes to a critical point after the Exodus. The children of Israel are slaves in Egypt, suffering under the hand of Pharaoh. They cry out to God for rescue, and God hears their cry and leads them out of Egypt, splits the Red Sea in half so that his beloved ones come across on dry land. God leads them into the Wilderness, under the leadership of Moses, as a different people, freed and set apart, towards the promised Land, the place where God would show them. A place where they would be called to live differently, to draw closer in communion with God and with the

flourishing vision that was once Eden. And how would these people live as set-apart, as a nation that would be blessed by God and mitigate blessing to others? The framework that God offered to Israel what we know as the Ten Commandments. The declaration of the 10 Commandments is one of the scriptures in the lectionary for today, our third Sunday of Lent. 'Then God spoke all these words:I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal.You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house;

you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

The 10 Commandments Story is often read through a very severe lens. Moses goes up to the Mountain, God delivers these words from on high through a storm filled with thunder and lightning, Moses carves the words into stone with his bare hands and returns, wild eyed and long-bearded from the Mountain to share these life and death commands with the people. Really, that's just the movie version, where Charlton Heston plays Moses. To our moderns ears, this story can seem very constrictive, the commands just a list of do's and don'ts, but if we look at the why, the underlying ethic to these commands, we see the movements of God to guide the people into right relationship with God, with one another, with creation and with themselves. “Have no other God before- I am the one who created, loves you, and calls you by name. Don't fall for the promise of other God's, other things, to sustain you.” “Remember the Sabbath day- rest is a good gift, believe that I am a God of abundance and that I will supply your needs. Life in my kingdom is not all toil and anxiety.” “Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not bear false witness- Live well with one another, extend love, friendship and mutual care. This is the way of Peace.”

You could extend this exercise to every one of these commandments. The 10 commands are a way of God saying, this is what it looks like to live in right relationship with all things. This is what life in Eden was like. I'm sure to the other nations and even to Israel these commandments felt wild and absurd, at times. And we know that as

people we fail at keeping these commandments regularly, we cannot keep this vision of God's ideal.

My hope in sharing this sermon is not to say that, oh, if only we could follow the 10 commandments to the letter, we'd be living in a modern day Eden. Rather, my hope is that we can consider together what it looks like to live out God's dream, The Gospel of Jesus- which is peace, healing, justice and love.

To do so calls for deep searching within ourselves and within our communities to ask the question, who are we serving? Who are you serving? The broader culture and how things are done? Or the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness? This is the driving question, I think, of identifying our own priorities. The gospel passage from the lectionary for this week is a dramatic asking of "whom do you serve?" question. This is John 2:13-16, "The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 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. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" In the temple, the Holy Place where people came to pray and experience the presence of God had become a place for commerce, a place where some people serve the all-mighty dollar, instead of the Lord. Jesus throws them out and asks, "Who are you serving? Whose house are you in? Who's dream is this? Is this the foolishness of the world or the Wisdom of the

Gospel?”

What does it look like to lean into the foolishness of the Gospel both as individuals and as sisters and brothers in a community of faith?

First, it looks like asking questions and growing the spiritual discipline of examination.

What are my motives? Why am I doing the things I am doing? For Lent, I gave “up Instagram, which is the social media platform that I spend the most time on. I knew I needed to break my scrolling habit- a way of checking out from my reality, my substitute for activities that would actually be more life-giving, but not as easy. Connecting with friends. Reading books. Making something with my hands. I took an intentional break from Instagram to give myself more space and more grace to pursue things that fill me up, without the bad news hangover that social media brought. Why am I doing this thing? What can I change?

Secondly, we choose to aim ourselves toward Jesus and living out God's dream. A beloved Pastor of mine always used that phrase “aiming ourselves towards God” or “Aiming our lives to live in God’s ways.” I think that “aiming” really captures the idea well- we’re trying, we’re doing our best to live as Jesus call us. We’re going to miss the target sometimes, that’s inevitable, but we’re trying, trusting that the Holy Spirit meets us in that place. I think of Sheila’s insightful comment last week after the sermon by Dan Epp-Tiessen. She talked about how we can ever expect to help bring peace to the world when it’s a struggle in our own relationships? She said peace starts here. And she’s

right, living God's dream, aiming ourselves towards God and his good, good foolish
gospel starts with our families, our neighbors, our churches. No arena is too small to live
out the gospel in. We can start where we're at.

Amen.