

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

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

²³When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰Where 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? ²¹For 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. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

²⁶Consider your own call, brothers and sisters:^[a] not many of you were wise by human standards,^[b] not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no one^[c] might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in^[d] the Lord.”

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

“Foolishness and Disruption”

Kerra Becker English

“And we mustn’t lose our senses of humor,” Mrs. Which said. “The only way to cope with something deadly serious is to try to treat it a little lightly.”

I knew I learned that somewhere. Turns out that last week’s sermon about turning to comedy in times of darkness and trouble came from a pretty deep place in my memory. That quote came from my favorite childhood book, *A Wrinkle in Time*. I decided to re-read it this week before it comes out on the big screen next weekend.

From fourth to sixth grade, I think I wore out our elementary school library’s copy of the book. I’m pretty sure I borrowed it a couple of times from the public library too. If you are not familiar with it, it is Madeleine L’Engle’s first book in a young adult novel series about confronting evil which is described in the book as this awful shadow called “the black thing.” The protagonists of the book are three kids, two boys and a girl, and it’s up to them to confront this darkness overshadowing the world. Sound familiar? Well, if it does, I dare say it was a little bit Harry Potter before there was a Harry Potter. It is set as a fantasy, but also as something that was way ahead of its time; it’s about equal parts Christian spirituality and Einsteinian theories of time and space. The 2005 edition offers an analysis of the book’s science with insights about the author, and Lisa Sonne who writes that analysis says, “For Madeline L’Engle, every good story and every good life is a search for answers through fiction, fact, and spirit. The poet, the physicist, and the prophet are all searching to understand the dimensions we can’t see, whether gravity, time, or love. *A Wrinkle in Time* is a great journey through dimensions – a journey of exploration and discovery, curiosity and awe.”

And now, re-reading it as an adult, I forgot just how biblically based and spiritually literate the book really is. When it gets to the climatic decision that has to be made, and Meg is called to be the one to go back through the darkness to save her brother from the evil that has him trapped, the lengthy quote L’Engle incorporates into her narrative comes from the passage from First Corinthians that I read this morning – only she is quoting from the King James Version. Meg Murry, the central character of the book, receives advice from one of the divine messengers, Mrs. Who, who tells her, “Listen, Meg. Listen well. *The foolishness of God is wiser*

than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.”

This was her inspirational pep talk to know courage in the face of evil. It is still that, especially for those of us who find ourselves on the reluctant sides of following our callings. We have to wonder a bit if we’ve stumbled into foolishness. Why would God use someone as imperfect as me? I’ve asked that a few times myself. And I think braces-wearing, plain looking, easy to get angry, smart but stubborn, Meg Murry has probably been my inspiration all along. She had heart and courage. She was terribly impatient but quick to love. She exemplifies a character who does what she is called to do – even if she’s doing it trembling.

Was she foolish? Probably. Was she weak? Some would say, yes. But we don’t really know exactly how we would act in the face of evil until we’ve had to do it ourselves. We try to physically and mentally prepare ourselves. We remind ourselves of the stories of people we admire who have faced difficult things with boldness and grace. But then the time comes when we do something or don’t do something. And we tend to judge ourselves accordingly.

Unfortunately, even after God uses misfit after misfit to teach us about love in the Hebrew Bible, and we have story after story that God uses the weak to confound the mighty, we get to Jesus and then cast him as absolute perfection. The gospel narratives don’t do that, but we do that. In scripture, Jesus is the unlikely Messiah. He may fit the description genetically. He may be the one called upon to lift the lowly and bring down the powerful from their thrones. And yet, Peter gets mad at him for talking about being killed. And his own disciples don’t understand his crazy logic. Though we don’t catch too many glimpses of Jesus wrestling with his calling, the fact that there’s some scriptural evidence that he did is telling. Given that Jesus either literally or metaphorically sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, I don’t doubt that he was nervous before he went through the temple with his whip chasing out the sellers and the money changers.

This example of Jesus’ public protest, of his disruption of the status quo is also an example of foolishness. Did he really think he was going to change the practice of churches selling stuff? Um. Well. Churches still sell stuff. Over the course of my ministry, I have sold hoagies, Barbecue chicken, a beer dinner at my house, and cookbooks. I couldn’t consider myself a Southern minister if I had never been in a church that sold cookbooks. We once even bought a unicycle at a church auction. No joke.

Will the world change according to our foolishness? Not likely. Will the wrongs be righted because of our public disruptions? Maybe for short bursts, but probably they will return to normal. So why believe? Why believe that we weak and foolish human beings have anything to offer? We believe because that's who we are. We ARE people who believe that evil does not get the final word, and that corruption is a shadow to be fought boldly and brought into the light.

I've been following the teacher strike in West Virginia closely because my sister and her husband are both West Virginia teachers. In a place where weakness and poverty are counted on to keep people quiet and complacent, teachers are standing strong together. And the vote still hasn't come, and the dignity that they are asking for has not yet been recognized by their government. The most telling story to me about the whole strike is that when school was out, TEACHERS, who were fighting for their long overdue raises, and adequate health care benefits, raised money from their own pockets to feed the impoverished children of West Virginia who wouldn't have meals to eat at home. Foolishness? Yes, some Senator so much as said so. Disruptive? Yes, the whole state has been out of school for days, and likely will be mandated to go into the summer months. How much difference will it make? Less than is probably fair. But I find it an interesting example of calling put into action. These teachers could move to a better paid state. They could change professions. And some probably will do one or both of those things. Do I think that every West Virginia teacher is pure and virtuous and every West Virginia legislator evil? It doesn't work out quite that way either. But as it unfolds the story will be told and re-told as part of West Virginia history from this point forward, so I'm very curious as to how it will be remembered.

We notice the foolishness. We notice the disruption. And yes, they are brilliant tools when fighting against the shadow, the darkness, corruption, greed, and evil. Evil loves to be fought with hate – eats it up and gets stronger. Evil hates to be confronted with love. Love destroys evil, bit by bit sometimes, but evil cannot continue in the light of love. So, my friends, embrace your foolishness, trust in your weakness, and don't be afraid to cause a disruption. Love always wins. Amen.