

# “To Live In Freedom”

Rev. Dr. David Holyan  
First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, March 4, 2018

## I Corinthians 1:18-25

*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. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’*

*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 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.*

## Exodus 20:1-17

*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. For six days you shall labour 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.*

*Honour 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 neighbour.*

*You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.*

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations, and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take all that we have within us, our words and our thoughts, our worries and our joys. Take the words that we've offered in song and in prayer, the words that we've heard read from Scripture, and the words that you've laid on my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless, and transform all of these into the living word of Jesus Christ. And let that word do its work among us, within us, and through us, that we might be a people guided by your word, nurtured and sustained by your word. Comforted by your word, that we might actually

become your word. The word of grace, mercy, love, and hope for others. We ask this in the faithful name of Jesus Christ, our lord. Amen. So earlier this week, when a congregant learned that the first reading was from First Corinthians on the foolishness of the cross, and they read the passage and heard about the wisdom and the signs and the back and the forth, the wise of the-- wisdom is foolish to God and God is foolish to the wise. The congregant said, "Oh, it says, 'foolishness of proclamation.' Ha ha. That's you. You get to get up and preach about that, and I want you to explain what the foolishness of the cross means."

I'm going to take a stab at that, but I'm going to do it in a way that may not be quite as direct as they had hoped. What does the foolishness of the cross mean? Is it that we're being saved, as we've always learned that it means, saved from our sin? Or might it be that we're being invited to consider salvation in a new way? Might the cross and its foolishness guide us or invite us into a different way of being? And might the passage, the famous passage of the ten commandments out of the book of Exodus shine a light on maybe what Jesus was all about when he died on the cross and rose again on Easter morning? The foolishness of the cross, what it means to be humbled in our old way of understanding, and maybe open up to a new way of being. To let our old way of life die, as we proclaim in baptism, and to rise into the newness of Jesus Christ. This in today's world is foolishness. And I learned that lesson yet again this week. I found myself sitting at a table with my children, one of whom, my son, had made dinner. My daughter was straight across from me. Her husband was to my left, Sam and Samantha to my right, and Jannnie in the corner. And I was telling them about a doctor's visit that I had had. Anna had asked me, "How did it go?" I told her, "Oh, it went fine." The doctor took x-rays and talked to me about all the different things that are going on in my back, did all kinds of squishy tests with my hands and my fingers. Asked how my neck was, whether I could bend, all the different questions. And then very gently patted my tummy and said, "You know, if you only he lost 10 pounds [laughter]."

I know y'all have heard this before because it's a recurring theme in my life, that every time I go to see a doctor, they pat my tummy and say, "If you only could lose 10 pounds." And my response is, "Well, I'm working on it. I've lost 10 pounds 42 times [laughter]." Never consistently one time after the other, but-- so I share this with my children, with my family, and my daughter looks across the table - the daughter for whom I have cooked most of her meals in her life - and asked, "Well, tell me, Dad. What did you eat yesterday?" I said, "Well, I got up early and had my oat cake that I have." I've gotten rid of the flour. I grind up the oats to make oat flour then add oats back in. I add the egg, mix it all up, and I dump in a whole bunch of [Gwen Rogers?] suggested prunes [laughter]. That's what medicine does to us, by the way [laughter]. I said, "After I come back from swimming, I make a smoothie. I stick a banana in the little cup, add in some frozen pineapple, a little scoop of protein powder, mix it all up, drink it down. I go to church with my trusty apple and a little jar of homemade chili-- beans and beef and spicy as all get-out. I get home, and I have broiled chicken with some peas and carrots the night before." I said, "This is what I'm doing. I'm really working on portion control and doing everything right." And my daughter - did I mention that I've cooked most of the meals in her life? - is sitting across from me, and she looks at me, and she's going, "Tch." Tch, tch, tch. Giving me that sound, shaking her head "no," and I'm like, "What?!"

Now, before I tell you what she said, you need to know that she and her husband Anthony look phenomenal. They had a wedding in October, and they slimmed down magically. They've kept it off. They both look great, and she's over there shaking her head, and she said, "Well, Dad, I'll tell you what your problem is. You had oatmeal, oats for breakfast? Carbs. You came back and had a smoothie and stuck a banana and a pineapple in it? Carbs. You went to church and had an apple? Carbs. You had chili with--? Carbs. You had chicken and a little bit of a-- what was it again? Peas and carrots? Carbs and carbs. Dad, you're just having too many carbs." I sat there completely humiliated [laughter]. But what I know is that every time I've gotten on the scale lately, it's moved down incrementally small, and I thought to myself, "Maybe she's onto something." And so, later, after I got home, I started to do some research. The next day, I did a bunch of research, and I realized that in my humiliation of sitting there, thinking that I was doing a great job, my daughter was actually inviting me to see things in a completely different and new way. This is the foolishness of the cross, where our old habits and our old way of seeing die. In order for something that is new and life-giving to arise in its place, for our old way of acting almost by rote, doing the same thing over and over again, going and buying the same brand of apples, the same number of bananas, the same kind of oatmeal, mixing it together, every week, the same thing over and over and over again. All of that now needs to change in order for something new to take its place.

And so I bought this awareness of needing to lay aside the old way of seeing things in order for something to take its place to my reading of Exodus. To one of the most special scriptures of the Old Testament, the law given to Moses on

the mountain by God, chiselled into stone, carried down for the people. Thou shall not, thou shall, thou shall not, thou shall, thou shall not, thou shall, thou shall, thou shall, thou shall remember the sabbath day. And I thought instead of reading this as the law, what if as one commentator said, "Instead of reading it, this as salvation sort of rules and checklist. You do these things and you're okay. You don't do those things, you're okay. And if you mess up, you're in trouble. Instead of reading salvation like we seem to be narrowly pigeonholing it more and more, what if we read salvation like the people of the Old Testament understood it." Salvation in the Old Testament was about God leading us out of slavery through the wilderness right to the edge of the promise land and then having us go across into that spacious, open, beautiful and abundant place that is set apart just for us. What if instead of a list of dues and don'ts, the 10 commandments are an invitation to us. An invitation for us to understand what it means to practice and live into the freedom that God has for us.

A freedom where we are not seduced by the messages of this world to believe that there's any God other than the God who wants our freedom and forgives us and wants the best for us. And the freedom to trust that even when we do the things that we are commanded not to do, that the grace of God is greater than any of our sins. So that whether we murder or commit adultery or steal or bear false witness or covert anything, God forgives us in Jesus Christ. We know the hurt that comes from acting in these ways. We know the tears that it creates in the fabric of our community. This is why God lays it out and says, "If you want to live in freedom and openness and in peacefulness and in joy, don't do these things to each other." I have come to realize that the most important part of the 10 commandments is at the very beginning, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." We believe in a God who constantly desires us to be liberated from all that keeps us captive and bound up. We believe in a God who wants us to trust so deeply that we need not fear when we face uncertainty or the future. This God wants nothing but the best for each of us. This God loves us. And if you ever hear the voice of God say to you, "Finish your peas and carrots." I give you permission to say no [laughter]. Amen.