



## With God, All Things are Possible... YIKES!!! – Touchpoint for January 25, 2023

**1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (NRSVA)** 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... 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.

... God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are...

**Matthew 5:1-12 (MSG)** <sup>1-2</sup> When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

<sup>3</sup> "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

<sup>4</sup> "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

<sup>5</sup> "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

<sup>6</sup> "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

<sup>7</sup> "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

<sup>8</sup> "You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

<sup>9</sup> "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

<sup>10</sup> "You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

<sup>11-12</sup> "Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

## **Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.**

*“God chose what is foolish... God chose what is weak... God chose things that are not... God chose what is low and despised...”*

Apparently, God is a low-life.

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the meek... Blessed are the merciful... Blessed are the peacemakers... Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness... Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account...”*

We live in a world where politicians are trying to make it illegal to teach anything that might make a student uncomfortable. We live in a world where people complain about being triggered. We live in a world where people believe they should never be offended.

So tell me. What should we do with these bible passages?

*“God chose what is foolish... God chose what is weak... God chose what is low and despised... God chose things that are not...”*

What should we do with these words from the Beatitudes?

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are the meek... Blessed are the persecuted...”*

If you're not offended by these words, you're not hearing them. This is everything you and I were taught in this country to NOT be.

Don't be foolish.

Don't be weak.

Don't be low on the food chain, economic or otherwise.

Don't be a nobody – someone who is not.

These are all the things I have spent my life trying not to be. These are all the things I was told not to be. These are all the things I have told my children not to be.

And yet, these are the things God chooses and chooses to be.

Let's face it. Strength is our god. Power is our god. And we have made them into the main attributes of the one God.

And we haven't just made these into the main attributes of God, we've made them into the exact things God can help us achieve.

**“WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE!”**

We always take this to mean that God will help me achieve MY goals, MY dreams, MY highest aspirations... Wisdom, strength, power, being on top and a somebody.

God is like a steroid injection into my greatest desires to make them possible.

But now, in light of the cross, in light of these words from Paul and Jesus... we see a different possibility.

**“WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE”** ... just might mean:

... That God just might make it possible for me to embrace those things considered weak and lowly and foolish by the world's standards. God just might make it possible for me to live in a way that is weak and lowly by the world's standards. God just might make it possible to live as a nobody by the world's standards.

God just might make all this possible!!!

YIKES!!!

You see, this is the basic problem that confronts any Christian living in our country today:

**We want the gospel and the WAY of Jesus to equip us to live successfully in the world...**

**When what the gospel and the WAY of Jesus want to do is equip us to live unsuccessfully in the world.**

So in light of that, the words "*With God all things are possible*" should be more frightening than reassuring. And any bible study that seeks to 'Biblically Equip' us to live in this world should strike terror in our hearts. Because the values and ways of the Kingdom of God are so at odds with the ways of our world.

That's why the last two Beatitudes are about being persecuted. Because that's how it's always been when you live by the Way of Jesus and the Ways of the Kingdom.

*"God chose what is foolish... God chose what is weak... God chose what is low and despised... God chose things that are not..."*

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the persecuted."*

The Beatitudes are Jesus' first teachings to his disciples in Matthew. He is preparing them for how to live unsuccessfully by the world's standards.

This is the WAY of Jesus. These are the Ways of living in the Kingdom.

**We want the gospel and the WAY of Jesus to equip us to live successfully in the world...**

**When what the gospel and the WAY of Jesus want to do is equip us to live unsuccessfully in the world.**

And that, my friends, just feels like an impossibility – to live in such a way as spoken of by Paul and Jesus.

These words from Paul in 1 Corinthians and Jesus in the Beatitudes confront us, challenge us, and offend us. They trigger a reflection on our lives that is uncomfortable.

They are offensive, triggering and uncomfortable. They are everything our culture fights against.

The gospel, the WAY of Jesus – being meek and merciful, are anathema to our way of life.

The things God chooses – the weak, the lowly, the foolish, are counter-cultural to our world's ways.

Let's be honest. This passage is a direct contradiction of all that we and our society hold dear. And the distance between the two cannot be bridged by some well-thought-out explanation, but only by a death and resurrection.

There is no way to live in this land, this society, and embrace these words without a death and resurrection. To paraphrase Jesus, "*One cannot worship both God and the status quo.*" One must die to the world to live in this Kingdom.

Just like we can't do an end run around Good Friday and stand on Easter Sunday, because it is the unacceptability of the One crucified on 'Good Friday' that gives Easter its punch... Just so, we can't do an

end run around these passages and jump to the triumphant glory of being a Christian, because the glory of Christianity is in God's presence in the suffering of the world.

These passages also point out the absurdity of what we have done with Christianity in this country.

We have said the point of Christianity is to **ACCEPT** Jesus. But the whole point of the crucifixion is to point out that Jesus is unacceptable to us... to the political leaders, to the religious leaders, to the common folk who cry out "Crucify Him!" and "We have no king but Caesar!"

This is why Paul calls the cross foolishness and a stumbling block. The unacceptable one has chosen the unacceptable, the weak, the foolish and low-lives. The unaccepted one has chosen to become unacceptable, weak, foolish and lowly. And in so doing, proclaims loud and clear that there are no 'unacceptables.'

And I don't know about you, but if there was one thing that was drilled into me growing up, it was to be 'Acceptable.'

And yet, here's what's interesting to me... the people in my life who are my heroes and heroines of the faith these days, are not those people who find Jesus acceptable.

They are those who discovered Jesus accepted them, in the lowest moments of their lives, when they couldn't even accept themselves and their situation. They are those who realized Jesus was next to them in their moments of greatest unacceptability, when they were at their lowest, their weakest, or their most foolish.

I must confess, it is so hard for me to get my head around these words, my arms around all this. My cultural upbringing just can't embrace it.

Trust me, I would like nothing more than to make it understandable to all of you. You know, show my theological wisdom in making this acceptable. But alas, God chose what is foolish to shame the wise, so I'm kind of in a Catch-22 here ... So let me just end with this:

Is there any better example of all this than this meal?

*"In the night in which Jesus was betrayed..."* and denied ... and deserted... All perfectly **unacceptable** reactions to the Messiah.

In that night, Jesus takes bread and drink, and says, *"This is me, for you. I will become the unacceptable, like you, so that we will be one in being unaccepted."*

From the world's point of view, this is not a wise response – this is foolishness. It shows weakness. Only a low-life loser would do this.

And yet, here is what the Way of Jesus, and the Ways of God proclaim:

This is God's strength, this is God's wisdom, this is God's somethingness... that God is not only willing to choose the weak, foolish, and nothing... but become weak, foolish and nothing.

To prove that not even in our weakness, foolishness or nothingness can we be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And that is why this meal, filled with betrayers, deniers, and doubters, is stunningly called a 'HOLY COMMUNION.'

And it can only be so because, **"With God, all things are possible..."**

**Amen.**

# **Spirit in the Desert**

## **Opening Songs**

### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

### **Calm Me Lord**

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.  
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.  
Let all the tumult within me cease.  
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

## **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **Dwell Among Us**

(Salt of the Sound)

Keep moving and living and breathing in us  
Keeping working and singing and speaking through us  
You dwell among us...  
With all this life I long to see, more of You and less of me  
Lord send Your spirit here to work in us

## **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

## **Benediction**

### **Sevenfold Amen**

(The Emmanuel Quartet)

**Amen.**