

Driving in Winter
Based on 1 Corinthians 1:1-19
Aspen Community UMC
January 20, 2008

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The followers of Jesus in Corinth – liked to think of themselves as wise.

Wisdom was a great thing. The word meaning wisdom – *Sophia* - is used in 1st Corinthians more than in any other New Testament book.

That says something about how important it was in Corinth and for that group of people who called themselves *ecclesia*, a church.

But, then don't we all like to appear wise?

People in Corinth were also interested in philosophy - from the Greek, *philo-sophia* – the love of wisdom.

But, what Paul was trying to tell them was that faith in Jesus Christ – or following the way of Jesus - was not a wisdom thing.

In fact, relying on wisdom to understand Jesus and his ways - could actually get in the way.

The source of faith for Paul was the cross - and that was experience - it was a seeing, hearing, and feeling experience - not an academic discipline like philosophy or theology.

For Paul, the source of faith was something that happened in the life, and death and resurrection of Jesus.

Now we might say:

Something happened in the life of the man that broke through the boundaries of mortality.

But, either way, as a concept it still does not make logical sense.

So, Paul went about trying to explain in words they could hear and in ways they might grasp.

He even went as far as to say that

the gospel (the news, the good news) was foolish.

It did not make sense. It did not follow or fit the intellectual understanding - the current scholarship of the day. That was then, and this is now.

The gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is still non-sensical.

We might say it is counter-intuitive.

And, in that vein, I thought of driving in winter - the slipping and sliding of driving on ice – how we try to do it -

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how we learn to do it – how we acquire that knowing.
Driving in winter – driving on ice is counter-intuitive, you know.
I want to turn one way – but I need to turn the other.
What I need to do is not what common reasoning would indicate.

There are winter driving schools where you can pay someone to help you
intentionally put your car into a fish-tail slide.

It takes practice because the course of action we must take
seems so absolutely against all our basic instincts.

When the back of the car starts to slide to the right,
our brain screams “turn left, turn left!”

And, if you follow your brain's advice, you are sure to have
about a 180 degree, if not 360 degree, thrill ride.

Our driver's education teachers all tried to convince us, “You must turn INTO a skid.”

You must turn the wheel in the direction you find yourself sliding.

Only then can you start to straighten out, slow down,
and regain control over the back end of your vehicle.

It is hard to learn something that is counter-intuitive
or counter to how we are accustomed to thinking.

It's like what Paul was telling the people in Corinth.

Perhaps his words can speak to us.

Paul writes from the logic of the ancient world.

At the time he wrote there were no formulations of the church -
no doctrines of the virgin birth, or the resurrection, or the Trinity, for example.

And, now for us, these are old.

Even so, we are still dealing with the early explanations of the growing church.

And those early understandings
were formulated before much of what we know today.

Several centuries following Paul's writing
Knowledge about how things worked in the universe
began to explode into human awareness.

Bishop John Spong wrote an article in a book called *The Once and Future Faith*.

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The article is called "A Christianity for Tomorrow."
He talks about the ways we have tried to understand the life of Jesus
and the beginning of the church.

One of the things he talked about was advancing knowledge
and how it has changed the way we understand our world – and our religions.
For example in the 18th century in the field of biology and human physiology,
we learned more about reproduction.

We learned how the female was a co-creator of each new child.

In learning more about human physiology,
virgin birth stories became far less plausible.

And, that story did not even exist at the time Paul wrote his letters.

When the birth story emerged, surely it gave Christians something to debate and argue using
the same methods the people in Corinth wanted to discuss and debate
how and when and by who one is baptized.

And, when Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo had completed their work
and human beings began to understand the vastness of the universe,
the story of Jesus' cosmic ascension

as the way he had returned to the God above the sky – no longer made literal sense.

We now know that if Jesus literally ascended into the sky
he would not have gone to heaven, he would have gone into orbit.

The early writers wrote from an entirely different worldview.

They wrote from what they knew of the world.

And it made sense to them.

But still that was knowledge or supposition about, not knowledge of.

I thought about how if Paul were here today
how he might negotiate our language and our worldview – to talk about his experience.

I expect he would still say that it defies logic – it defies wisdom –
but it does not defy learning by seeing, by hearing, by feeling
those things we do in worship, in prayer, in music, in action.

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Paul was saying to the people in Corinth,
your wisdom and learning – that you so highly respect – is not enough
to define the Christ experience.

I expect he would say the same to us.

And, as learned as Paul was, and as articulate,
and able to put his thoughts on paper (papyrus then) as he was
he would respect the knowledge and even biblical interpretation of our day.

But I believe he would say something similar.

He was trying to describe God coming together with this world in Jesus.

He used the term "reconciling."

He said, the purpose of God's presence in Christ was "to reconcile."

But, remember, he was trying to communicate an experience – not his knowledge.

What is important to me about this scripture is that I can read it today
and read it within my scientific and historical point of view,
and I don't have to compromise my worldview to understand his experience
to try and imagine his experience, to hear it, to see it, to feel it.

I think Paul is saying that through his experience of the risen Christ
he discovered a window into the heart of God.

And that we also have a window into the heart of God -
a window into the heart of God.

Paul did not have the formulations of the church that we can look back on today.

There was no Apostles Creed. There was no Trinity.

There was no Roman Catholic or Orthodox Church with doctrines
that people were expected to understand or believe.

For Paul, it was a visceral experience,
and he tried to communicate it to people who wanted to learn more.
And some such learning is seeing, some is hearing, and some is feeling.

They were just getting tripped up in the debate of it all.

Doing what they might do in school. Perhaps they did not know how
to see or hear or feel this window into the heart of God that Paul had discovered.

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There was not really a line of thinking or logic that would get people there.

It was a little like driving in winter -
and letting that remind us that it does not have to make sense
in the ways we make sense of most of our lives.
We can go in circles, with different lines of reasoning,
when really what Paul is inviting us to do is open
ourselves to what the divine might want us to hear, or see, or feel - something beyond words.

You may know the song by Jan Garrett and JD Martin
called "Living in the Heart of God."
They played it Friday night at the Shalom Shabbat service here in this sanctuary.
"Nothing is ever lost and we are not forgotten,
Living in the heart of God. We are living, living in the heart of God."

I wonder if these words might be what Paul would be communicating
and if he were here in this room today -
if he would not give some words like this
as he tried to share with us that amazing experience that he had
that changed his life.

The people in Corinth knew how to debate and to argue their different points of view.
What they were missing was the nature of the experience of
divine love – and the invitation to simply practice the presence.
Was that counter-intuitive? It seems that it was.

Was shifting their practice of faith like driving in winter?
Perhaps it was.

But what is most important is this.
We learn of God's love in much that we do.
We know it in the quiet inside our hearts.
We know it in the joy of song, and we know it in the depth of prayer.
We know it in the presence of something greater, and Paul would surely want us to know that.