**None of the Above?**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 2:9-10**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

**February 9, 2020**

It was late in the afternoon when I got home; a beautiful spring day in Toronto. I’d been out making pastoral calls. As I pulled into the driveway, my then-wife was spreading newspapers on the front lawn. I said, “What are you doing?!

She said, “You know what I’m doing.” It was that tone of voice known to every husband in the world that says, “You’re in big trouble, mister!”

I thought for a moment, and then it came to me. This was the afternoon that I had agreed to convert part of the lawn into a garden. I’d forgotten.

Cora had read online about a way to transform lawn to garden without having to rototiller or turn over sod or anything. You just had to spread newspaper on the lawn, and put topsoil on the newspaper, and let it sit for a couple of weeks. The *theory* said that the grass would die under the newspaper, the paper would decompose and voila!; you’ve got a garden.

My mission – which I now had no choice but to accept – was to spend that entire Friday evening laying down the newspaper, shoveling on the dirt, and hoping for the best.

So I got busy: 2 sheets of newspaper, and a shovel full of dirt; 2 sheets of newspaper, and a shovel full of dirt. It was slow going. After about an hour I’m thinking, “This is crazy; I’ve got a sermon to write!” 2 sheets of newspaper, and a shovel full of dirt… And then I got to wondering: did the person who posted this actually try it? Am I dealing here with a speculative theory or proven fact? 2 sheets of newspaper, and a shovel full of dirt. After another hour, with lots of lawn to go, I was near despair. And then I thought, “You know, this is going to make a great sermon illustration some day.” In fact, I started to write the sermon in my head. And by the time the last bit of light faded from the sky, the newspaper was down, the soil was spread, and I went inside for supper.

Two weeks later…we had a garden all ready for planting. Turns out that the person who posted it *had* tried it. She knew what she was talking about.

It wouldn’t be the first time that an idea was deemed crazy, even though it came from someone who knew what he or she was taking about. Consider the notion of salvation through the Cross: Paul says that the idea is foolishness; even through it comes from the heart of God. Here what he says today in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10:

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.”

True wisdom comes from the depths of God. And if anyone knows what He’s talking about, it’s God. True wisdom is God’s wisdom: conceived in eternity and revealed in history: especially in the Cross.

This is the wisdom that we explored last week: the wisdom that says that lives are transformed, relationships are transformed, the world is transformed when we enter into each other’s suffering; and we enter into God’s suffering. God absorbs such suffering into God’s own heart, and there it is transformed into new life.

That’s what happened on the Cross: God absorbed the world’s suffering into God’s own heart. Through the Cross and the Empty Tomb, God in Christ absorbed and transformed suffering into joy, death into life, and despair into hope. And this has been revealed through scripture and experience for all the world to see. No eye had seen it until God revealed it. And now it’s there for the whole world to see.

If they’ll stop and look. But it’s hard to look at a bloody execution stick. It’s hard to bear the burden of a fellow believer, or a neighbor, or a friend. It’s hard to take on the misery of the world.

True wisdom is God’s wisdom, revealed in scripture and experience and *especially* in the Cross.

But Paul rightly points out that the world knows not such wisdom. The rulers of this age don’t understand the wisdom of suffering love; if they didn’t, they wouldn’t have crucified Jesus. The rulers of this age don’t understand empathy, whether those rulers walk the corridors of corporate power or political power. But increasingly the folks at the grass roots level don’t understand it either. We don’t understand the wisdom of bearing one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). We don’t see it, even though God has revealed it. We don’t test it against experience. We don’t trust it – like I didn’t trust the strategy of spreading newspaper on the lawn – we don’t trust it, even though the One who has revealed it knows what He’s talking about it.

This is part of the reason why the Church is in such trouble: we don’t trust the wisdom of our own teaching. We’re reluctant to enter into the suffering of another, whether it’s our next door neighbor or the neighbor on the southern border or the fellow citizen who comes at politics from a different perspective than mine and who’s struggling as much as I am, trying to figure it all out. It’s a lot easier to say, “I know how to fix your problem,” rather than to suffer with someone in that problem. It’s a lot easier to say to someone across the political aisle, “You’re crazy” or “You’re not patriotic” or “You don’t know the facts,” rather than suffering with and trying to work with that person as together we figure it out.

If *we* don’t take seriously the wisdom of biblical faith, how do we expect our children and grandchildren to do so? If we don’t take seriously the *disciplines* of biblical faith – prayer and Bible study and listening to each other and engaging with the community and world and putting our spiritual gifts to good use – if *we* don’t take these disciplines seriously and practice them, is it any wonder that folks are leaving the Church?

If you go down a list of religious affiliations in the United States – Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and so on – do you know which group is the largest? None of the above. The so-called “Nones” – N-O-N-E-S – the “Nones” – those who are not members of any religious organization – they are now larger than either evangelical Protestants or Roman Catholics; the two groups that use to be at the top of the list.

Across the theological spectrum, churches are bleeding members. Across the theological spectrum, we find churches and individuals who don’t see the wisdom of the Cross any more than the Corinthians did. For example, surveys show that a large percentage of self-styled White Evangelicals don’t even go to church very often. You can’t discern God’s wisdom if you’re not in a position to hear God’s Word. And so-called Progressive Christians mistake the cool idea of the week for some kind of updated version of Christianity. And so many of us who are in church regularly see the church more as a family or a support group than a place of learning and a mission station. And, of course, we *are* a family; we *are* a support group. But we’re called to be so much more.

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived…these things God has revealed to us.” God knows what God is talking about. Just like the person who posted that new way to create a garden. And I had to hear what she had to say, and trust what she had to say, and experiment with what she had to say in order to know it fully myself. I couldn’t yet see it with my own eyes; I couldn’t yet get my heart and my head around it. I had to hear and trust and experiment with the wisdom in that online post and *then* I could see the evidence.

And that’s what we’re called to do with the wisdom of God. We have to hear the Word, and trust the Word, and experiment with the Word in order to live fully into the Word and see the wisdom that the Word reveals.

We have to hear the Word, which means we have to actually read the Bible from time to time. We have to hear the Word, which means creating worship and learning opportunities in which the Word can be engaged. We Disciples pride ourselves on having the freedom to make-up our own minds on matters of faith. But that’s not really what our tradition says. Yes, we have the freedom to make-up our own minds, *as those minds are guided by scripture*. We are called to listen to the Word with our minds and our hearts, and *then* make-up our own minds. Our Disciples founders said, “No creed by Christ, no book but the Bible.” They didn’t say, “No creed but myself and no book but the one I read last week.” If you’re going to believe whatever you darn well choose to believe, then you’re substituting the tyranny of your own spirit for the tyranny of some pope or bishop or authoritarian preacher. Make up your own mind, yes; but first, hear the Word.

There is wisdom in the Word. It is the wisdom of the ages. It has been tested across cultures for more than 2,000 years. And we are creating opportunities for the Word to be heard more clearly in this place. That’s what Children Worship and Wonder is all about. That’s what the Sunday morning adult class is all about. God has revealed the wisdom of the ages through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, who is the Word incarnate. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. That’s why we need to hear the Word.

We need to hear the Word, and *trust* the Word. Even though the world considers the wisdom of God to be foolishness, we need to trust the Word. Even though we ourselves may think that it’s crazy, we need to trust the Word. The Word teaches us about redemptive suffering. But the world teaches that the way to get ahead is not to *suffer* with another person, but to *defeat* that person, to *insult* that person, to acquire more money or influence or power than that person. That’s what the Romans did to Jesus: they tried to insult and defeat and overpower him. They sought victory through power. But the victory was won through suffering; the victory was won through the Cross. That’s foolishness. That’s crazy. That’s what conventional wisdom says. You want to save the nation? Overpower the opposition. You want to save the nation? Build a wall and keep people out. But the Cross says that if you want to save the church or the nation or the world, you need to forgive people who don’t know what they’re doing; and come alongside people even if it means bearing a cross with them; and trust the power of the Spirit to do the seemingly impossible in those situations, no matter how crazy that may seem.

We have to hear the Word, and trust the Word, and experiment with the Word, in order to realize the Word’s wisdom. I couldn’t hardly believe that seemingly stupid theory about the garden. But I experimented with it anyway. Not that I had any choice in the matter! We say that seeing is believing. But sometimes you have to believe before you can see. Sometimes you have to act *as if* something is true before you can see that it *is* true. No eye had seen or believed what God revealed through the Cross, *until* God revealed it. And the first Christians still had trouble believing it until they experimented with it. And the Romans made *sure* they experimented with it because they *forced* the early Church to suffer, whether those first Christians wanted to or not. Sometimes *not* having a choice is a good thing because it forces you to experiment with crazy things that you otherwise wouldn’t touch with a ten foot pole.

I can’t truly know you until I listen to you, and you reveal your story to me. I can’t truly know you until I walk beside you, and we experience some things together; sometimes painful things. This is how we get to know each other; and this is how we get to know God: by listening to the wisdom revealed through the Cross, and trusting that wisdom and living into that wisdom. If *we* take that wisdom seriously – if we take the Word seriously – maybe others will as well.

You can find a lot of crazy ideas in the Bible. Sometimes you have to just go with them. *Then* you’ll see the evidence; *then* the eye will see and the ear hear what God has revealed through the Cross. Therein lies wisdom. Amen.