

I'm the **stealth** preacher; you didn't know I was coming; but here I am and here you are.. and it's probably too late to for either of us to change our mind.....I even got tied up. A public speaker friend told me, if you speech hasn't come together as you hoped; **dress up better**. Procrastination and two days of history breaking 24 hr news is not a good combination.

So let's listen to the second scripture text. I comes from One Corinthians 1: 10-18

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There is a lot to respond to in this text. We could talk about “ have no divisions among you and be of one mind”; We know something about divisions among us and choosing who we will follow. But we won't go there. Been there, done that and it hurt too much.

Or we could consider that this year is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant reformation. It started as divisions in or reforms of the one mind, of **THE** church. This reform from within the church quickly began **or begat** the creation of new churches. They sought to proclaim and establish one truth above the other. Soon wars were fought over those divisions. But, we won't talk about that either.

**Or** we could look at the 31 denominations and 13 non-denominational churches represented in the 100 churches listed in Asheville. They are online in Yelp. **Yup**, you rate your church. My college classmate, Wes Granberg- Michaelson, in his Sojourners article on the reformation reports there are 43,800 denominations in the world. That is **a lot** of divisions among us and a very fragmented one mind. So we won't go there either.

Or we could talk about Paul's note in his letter to the church at Corinth where he says his preaching need not be eloquent wisdom; in fact he rejects eloquent wisdom so it doesn't obscure the message of the cross. Not a worry about that this morning.

We **could** talk about any of those, but we won't. (But of course you know that I just did.)

**Instead** I want to talk about the message of the cross that Paul says is foolishness to those that are perishing but to those being transformed/being saved ,it is the power of God. And secondly to think about this great light that Isaiah says came to those living in deep darkness and to those who have known the rod of the oppressor. Perhaps those who are perishing according to Paul are of the same category as those living in deep darkness that Isaiah refers to.

What makes the message of the cross foolish? A dead guy, killed by the state, is the one to worship, the one model life to emulate?. A man from Nazareth of all places? Leader of a rag tag protest group. .A man who claimed special connections to God and yet couldn't get himself out of this deadly deal? Why would you call that crucifixion day **good** Friday? Man that's crazy. You gotta be a fool to buy that.

And yet Paul says... those who are being transformed experience the power God in the cross. Out of the dark shadow of the cross they see a bright light promised in Isaiah. Today is the third Sunday of epiphany where the church celebrates the three travelers from the east who saw and followed a bright light to see the child who would become the son of god or as he described himself, the son of man. Some churches celebrate epiphany as the baptism of Jesus by John. The two times when Jesus is recognized as the Christ.. Epiphany, in a less specific cultural context means come to the realization, awareness or a feeling of knowledge after which everything is seen through the prism a new light, an enlightenment, or insight. It's the light bulb over the head in cartoon.

As I was trying to come up with one word that might best capture the meaning of epiphany I remembered the word GROK. Anyone else remember GROK? It's from Robert Heinlein's science fiction novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*. It means to achieve such full understanding and awareness that you merge with, become one with new awareness. This is the power of God that brings about transformation/ new life from a radically changed point of view. This is grace.

What we have here is the connection of two of the great themes of the bible: the experience of the darkness: pain and suffering, rejection, all the little deaths in life, the public and private sins, that occur **before** the vision of the light, the healing, the acceptance, the unity, and transformation. The dark precedes the light; the down comes before the up. The cross before the resurrection.

Consider these examples:

the Hebrews faced the dark days of slavery **down** in Egypt before the escape and freedom of the Exodus.

Jonah sails away from the call of God, gets thrown overboard and spends 3 days (default value with 7 and 40) **down in the** belly of the fish; when his life was “ebbing away” he prays gratefully remembering that God had brought him “**up** from the pit” whereupon the fish barfs him **up** on the shore to speak the word of God to the people of Nineveh.

Jacob wrestling with the angel injures his hip and **after** he is wounded **then** gets a blessing and a name change to Israel to confirm the transformation.

Job loses everything. Then **after** a long suffering he realizes that God is not about answers but “too wonderful for him to behold “and God **then** restored the fortunes of Job twofold.

World is drowning in the flood and then Noah looks **up** to see the dove with the olive branch of peace.

Jesus endures an initiation- like ritual testing in the desert **after** which he begins his ministry.

Can anything good come out of such a place as Nazareth? Or as we might say “Can anything good come out of Madison County?” The lowly town with a bad reputation. Well yes it can, yes it does.

The prodigal son is not just about a welcoming and forgiven father. It is about where the son came from before the father stretched out his arms. The good son never went down and didn't get a feast.

Zacchaeus climbs **up** a tree to connect with Jesus but Jesus says come **down** and then I'll spend the night at your home.

A paralytic **man** seeks to be healed by Jesus is passed **down** through the roof to be in the presence of Jesus and then he is healed.

Is that enough that you see the pattern? More than enough?

If you see the text as merely facts or history, my listing of Bible stories or events may be no more than a listing of incidents or stories. But these stories individually and especially taken together carry ancient myth that point us to meaning and truth and healing. Myths are not challenged or threaten by

history or science. They are of a different character; they are universal, eternal and spiritual. They are threads that run through the fabric of history, not far from the treads of dreams. Joseph Campbell defines myth as the poetic expression of transcendent seeing or vision.

In events in our lives we can see the foolish truth of the myths of darkness and light, of going down **comes before** rising up. This is the grace of epiphany.

AIDS patients who say that AIDS was the best thing to happen to them because they experienced the fragility of life and grew to actually appreciate each day in its fullness. Families who discover that they really haven't lost everything when the house burned because they discovered what is really important to them. Folks in 12 step programs who realize that they had to hit bottom first before a commitment to recovery worked.. The crucible, from the same root word as cross, of painful divorce that leads to newly discovered self-confidence and independence. In the deep darkness these people have seen a great light. The epiphany that is the light of the world,

And these symbols of cross and light and the myths around them have been around for a long time, before and after biblical times not related to Christianity.. In many times and cultures the cross has symbolized the intersection of the vertical and horizontal; the spiritual and the mundane. It has also been connected to the tree of life or the tree in the garden of Eden. In the Christian creation myth God creates light first but it came from the void of darkness.. All the rest follows; without light we could not see our world so we turn to the light of the world.

As far back as we can go myths and ritual were a crucial (also from the same root word as cross) part of life. But now we've mostly lost them in our culture . Now we equate only verifiable fact with truth. Well, up until this year at least.

Our prevailing cultural story is one of money and markets, rugged individualists, and a mechanistic world. And we are upwardly competition driven culture. Humility is not highly valued, Everything is a competition to win, to demonstrate our superiority and control. In Sports of course. But also in cooking, survival on the island, apprentice, talent, dancing, voice, flea marketing, dating, sharks, school grades, who has the most stuff, or the newest things

Driven to win we can't show any vulnerability. We don't dare expose the true self inside.. So we are reluctant to risk rejection or connection or to be shamed. It feels dangerous to talk in depth about our fears, our loneliness, our weaknesses, our incompetencies. Our imperfections are our lonely secrets. We continue the lies we tell ourselves about ourselves and deny or pretend all of this inner struggle isn't real.. And we wonder if we are good enough.

But instead of the security and strength we hoped our emotional silence would bring us, we feel precisely what we tried to avoid. We continue to feel disconnected and inadequate and fear we will be found out. By avoiding the darkness, we can't see the light. By not allowing ourselves to feel down we miss the birthplace of joy. It is counter-intuitive, nonsense or as Paul said, foolishness Yet it was the court jester who played the fool and told the king the truth.

It seem to me I have a more deeply spiritual connection to those I've been through a kind of dark hell with. My shadow has been exposed. Not only have I emotionally survived but I'm better than I imagined. With that person I can freely be **lighthearted**. Our true imperfect selves are seen by each other and not rejected but embraced. What we shared was dark enough so that we could see.