

BUT WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST

The Rev. Dr. Craig Malbon
I Corinthians 2:1-16

The 2nd Lectionary Reading is 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

1 When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom, but on the power of God.

6 Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7 But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written,

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him” —*

10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them, because these are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

*16 “For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.*

Today's Lectionary reading is from the Apostle Paul. According to Acts 18:1-17, Paul's first visit to the city-state of Corinth on the Isthmus of Corinth occurred in ~51 C.E. Some time later (before or while in Ephesus), Paul writes his first letter to the Corinthians, in response to a no longer extant letter. From Paul's letter we can ascertain that there is disorder in the church in Corinth. Paul's approach is to focus the reader on faith and contrast the faith in God from wisdom in this world. He professes that he avoided knowledge, but rather focused on the narrative of Christ crucified. *2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* Humans constantly reassure themselves through Logos (λογος, *Logos*), the personification of wisdom in Ancient Greece, through the Enlightenment, and perhaps through post-modern thought, that all of creation can be discerned via human analytical tools. The Ancient Greeks ranked theology at the top of the list of disciplines, above physics and mathematics, understanding that the knowledge of God (θεος, "theos") must be beyond mortal capabilities. Theology was a pursuit, not an endpoint! Paul intentionally avoids the trap of human knowledge when approaching the Corinthians, who likely included a number of

sophisticated people. *5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.* The limited analytical tools of this world do not confine the ultimate search for knowledge and Truth. During Christmastide, in the company of secularists, we may hear comments referring to Christianity as a quaint and passé experiment. We all know that the search for the historical Jesus, outside of the Gospel narratives and history of Flavius Josephus, will be disappointing with respect to artifacts and precise dates. Even in the 1st C, Paul offers us that which has been demonstrated over and over into the 21st C, *8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.* The Roman governor, the chief priest and Jewish religious sects, the principal people of authority, the intelligentsia, professed truth, but only offer ignorance of the Son of Man. From the topside of power and control, the Good News both seemed silly and dangerous. Think of early church houses in which both slaves and their masters hear the Gospel, redemptive for both, but certainly unnerving for the latter. Imagine a master standing next to his slave as the Apostle Paul proclaims the Good News. How about in our current times? Do the top-siders find comfort in the Gospel message? Is the Good News to the poor today in 2017 that there will be no preferential option to the poor? Think about the news!

Paul is wrestling in Corinth with the same limitations of the human mind confronting a decidedly spiritual matter, i.e., faith. *“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”.* Herein Paul echoes the prophetic words of Isaiah (64:4) and rightly so for revelation and prophetic action. But revelation and prophecy alone are not enough for that which God’s Spirit offers to us. The receipt, embrace and validation of the Word and Spirit yet require faith. Paul informs us more precisely about the role of Spirit. *12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 ... we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit,* The Good News was/is accessible both from the topside as well as the underside of human life, but in both cases is limited by faith. This faith of which Paul and Isaiah speak lay beyond mortal knowledge. *“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, ...”*

Paul confronts skepticism then, just as we do now? There are some who profess that skepticism and Christianity are anathema, they cannot be reconciled with each other. To which I reply, “By no means!”. Many of us practice what the Rev. Christopher Morse referred to in his bestselling book entitled *Not Every Spirit* as “faithful disbelief”. Faithful disbelief is not doubt in God acting in our lives. Yet, it can seem the case when we are caught in life’s toughest challenges: broken relationships, broken minds, broken bodies, death and dying. Faithful disbelief is not skepticism in the common sense of withholding judgment in the absence of cold, hard facts. Faithful disbelief rather reflects a solemn trust in God. Faithful disbelief is a healthy disbelief in any theology offered that seems unjustifiable based upon our belief in God. Sometimes it is no more than a “gut” feeling. If someone professes that our God merely rains down upon us destruction and punishment, what is our gut telling us? We embrace Almighty God as our Creator who brings hope of all human flourishing. We may feel “faithful disbelief” to a reference of a punitive god. If we hear someone castigate a sick person as having received his/her just deserts from a God who simply meters out punishment in response to human fallenness, we feel a “faithful disbelief” in our gut.

The key role in faith is that of the Holy Spirit, according to Paul. *11 For what human being*

knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. Paul concludes his remarks on the role of the Spirit in formation of faith, by turning to those for who doubt and skepticism discount knowledge that is beyond analytical understanding, i.e., that which requires faith. *14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because these gifts are spiritually discerned.* Here we return to the position of the post-modern, post-human secularists who do, quite frankly, ascribe faith to some form of primitive silliness, simple-mindedness, and foolishness. Such were many in the days of Paul and we surely do have a rich complement of them in the 21st C. Let me note a remarkable, low-probability event. In the 1st C there were several hundred followers of Jesus; in 2017, there are estimated to be >2.2 billion Christians! Does this reflect a global foolishness? Many believers actively are seeking to discern how God acts in their individual lives. These are lives just like yours and mine. Now I readily admit that some practice Christianity without skepticism, some practice Christianity with faithful disbelief, and some practice Christianity from the broad menu of denominations and cardinal beliefs. Diversity of faith for Christians is not ever likely to yield a monolithic line of beliefs and faith any time soon.

So Paul rightly discerns for us the role of the Holy Spirit operating in us as we apprehend the Good News and our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. I offer that we humans have two paths of discernment, an outward as well as an inward path. The outward path is shaped largely by input, observations, “facts” from the outside world. This outward path finds grounding in knowledge, while professing that there is faith beyond knowledge. The inward or inner path is the path of which Paul informs us today in his letter to the church in Corinth. The inward path communicates with the outward path, but extends beyond, through self-discernment in trying to grasp how God acts in our lives. The outward path appears to be simpler, since we know the inputs and through analysis can deduce consequences in our lives. The inner path is hard, includes faithful disbelief, and skepticism not designed to destroy our faith, but rather to enliven it.

Let me return to the notion of faith being for the simple-minded and the foolish. We already agree that this position is implied today through voices of some people and echoed in the media that supports it. I would offer that Christianity most certainly is not a refuge for the foolish and for the simple-minded. My data set in outward path thinking is extensive and compelling (I think), so let me share just a bit. Perhaps it is common knowledge that there are, in fact, great minds in physics, mathematics, and cosmology who are/were devout Christians: Kepler, Pascal, Newton, and others. But, you might say, that's ancient history and this is the 21st C! I recall the first Nobel Prize laureate that I met, Dr. Charles Townes. It was in 1962 at MIT Alumni day and Townes put on the first public demonstration of a laser! What a show it was! There is the English physicist John Polkinghorne. Polkinghorne was a leading Cambridge theoretical physicist and writer who became an Episcopal priest. The Lutheran American physician and Nobel Laureate (2003) Peter Agre is another. The American Nobel Prize winner in Chemistry (2012) Brian Kobilka, who also was awarded the Mendel Medal from Villanova University, which honors “outstanding scientists who demonstrate in their lives no intrinsic conflict between science and religion”. Francis Collins, director of the NIH and former director of the human genome project, writes on the interface of religion and science from an

Evangelical Christian perspective. These are but a few of the 21st C Christians who see no conflict in skepticism and faith in Christ. Yes, faith is hard, self-discernment is hard, and both require us to open the apertures of our hearts and minds.

Paul concludes this pericope by reminding us in the simplest words possible about how we go about our inward journey of self-discernment and faith formation... **16b** *But we have the mind of Christ.* We have the mind of Christ when we profess Christ crucified. I seriously doubt that the Apostle Paul or I or any Christian can help you to fully unpack how we have and can make use of the mind of Christ in self-discernment. If it were only so easy to stand up in front of you, dear brothers and sisters, for 20 min to transfer that which I hold true in my soul! Unlike discoveries in science that can be taught through lectures to 15,000 attendees at a conference, faith cannot be taught. Faith cannot be taught. Faith can be modeled, witnessed, discerned and must be lived. Throughout my life I have been blessed with the skepticism of an analytical mind. I never feared asking myself “Where is God in my life?” and “How is God acting in my life?” A leading neuroscientist and former Stony Brook colleague now at Stanford, William Newsome offers poignantly, “When I discuss religion with my fellow scientists...I realize I am somewhat of an oddity- a serious Christian and a respected scientist.” I feel the same as a scientist and Christian. When it comes to faith, I am just as much at home with you dear friends as I am with physicists and cosmologists. Faith can guide and expand us in many ways. Yet, my anecdotes about others will not help you to form your spirit. Rather, all I can offer to you is my own testimony. I can bear witness to the power of my Christian faith in life’s darkest moments, throughout my life, even as a child. As a pastor and a chaplain working with those struggling with daunting landscapes of broken relationships, broken bodies, and pending death, my belief in Christ crucified helps me and enlivens me. My faith empowers me to help others who are searching to detect Almighty God acting in their lives through Christ crucified. These are challenging times, friends, let us help each other to greater spiritual formation. Let us encourage a healthy faithful disbelief. Let us embrace skepticism in our Christian discernment to embolden, not weaken, our faith in God. You cannot compel someone else to faith, but your daily testimony as to how God acts in your life, tangibly, especially in the face of hardship can foster faith in others. This morning as we meet within the Body of Christ and partake of the physical Gospel of Holy communion, let us encourage each other to that inward journey of faith in Christ crucified. Therein, friends, one truly finds the beginning of the inward path of self-discernment.

Let us pray,

O God, Jesus tells us that faith as a mustard seed enables us to move mountains. Jesus tells us that if we have a mustard seed amount of faith in the Word of God, nothing would be impossible for us. Yet, O Lord, we often wonder where you are in our lives, without observing that often it is simply us who have turned away from You. Help us O Lord, as we are in need of spiritual renewal, this day and every day. You sent to us the Holy Spirit to guide and encourage us, help us to open our very souls to the Spirit as it guides us through the inward journey towards You, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen