

## **SERMON: 26 January 2020 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **“The Foolish Power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:10-18 and Matthew 4:12-23)**

*Lord, I come not with wise and persuasive words but in the hope of a demonstration of the Spirit's power, that your Word might reach our hearts and transform our minds. In Jesus name.*

In 2005, Brennan Manning wrote an ordinary book with a great title, *The Importance of Being Foolish: How to Think like Jesus*.

The book has some great quotes, like this one:

[SLIDE] “We cannot possess the mind of Christ until we recognise ourselves as forgiven enemies of God and in like manner extend forgiveness and reconciliation to our own enemies. Jesus Christ crucified is not merely a heroic example to the church; he is the power of God, a living force transforming our lives through his Word”.

Notice that it is *Jesus Christ crucified* that is the power of God. That's based on what Paul wrote in the first letter to the Corinthians.

Paul was writing into a situation not all that different from today. There were divisions in the church. There were those who liked things one way and those who liked them another way. There were those who preferred Apollos as a preacher and others who preferred Peter.

It's into that situation of disunity that Paul more or less says, what are you guys playing at? It's not about who's the best at preaching or who does the best baptism. And when it comes to preaching it's certainly not about human wisdom. That's why I came to you in weakness not with eloquent words.

[SLIDE] 'For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (1:18).

What can he possibly mean when he says this?

I think he meant something like this. If we can't accept or haven't yet accepted that God in Christ loved the world so much that he was prepared to enter into it fully to such an extent that Jesus laid down his life in order to

express that love most fully, then we will not be experiencing life as God intended life to be lived.

On the contrary, if we have accepted this grace and truth then we will experience life lived in the power of God, a power not of the world but a Christ filled power that would walk a similar path that Jesus walked

Which might involve standing up for truth and justice in the way that Jesus did (and now wants to do through us).

It might mean learning to lay down our own desires for the benefit of others.

It will definitely mean, having heard Jesus' call to repent or turn back from our own programmes and plans

in order to embrace the kingdom of heaven (Matt 4:17) and start living by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And to that extent we might call it the foolish power of God which is stronger than any human strength and wiser than any human wisdom.

As Paul goes onto say in verse 25:

[SLIDE] For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

You see, human strength can and does work in opposition to God's kingdom. We saw it in Jesus life. That's why he was crucified. Because he was up against human strength and worldly wisdom.

Matthew tells us that in verse 23 that,  
'Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and illness among the people.'

But it all came to an end. It didn't last.

This beautiful move of the Holy Spirit was dragged away violently, beaten, despised, falsely accused, spat upon and then crucified on a wooden cross and left to die in agony.

[SLIDE] As Brennan Manning put it, “Jesus entered our world as the music man but the world was disturbed by his song. On Good Friday the world went back to the peace that it needed.”

Manning reminds us that it was our world that rejected, despised and killed Jesus - the world we are part of.

Not some other world. We can't blame another world. It was our world.

Our world can be a cruel place. It's often very unjust. It's often very unfair. It sometimes crucifies the innocent.

And yet, Paul says, its the message of the cross that is the power of God.

Because God's ways are not our ways. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's wisdom is not our wisdom. God's strength is not our strength. God's sense of justice is not our idea of justice. God's willingness to forgive is not like our reluctance to forgive. God's love is not like our love.

For God so loved the world that God gave God's one and only Son, that whoever believes in this Son shall not perish but have eternal life.

It doesn't matter whether or not we've failed all our lives.  
It doesn't matter if we've made mistake after mistake.  
It doesn't matter if we've been beaten time and time again.  
It doesn't matter if we've lost that battle we thought we'd win.

What matters is that we tried.  
We tried to do the right thing.  
We tried to preach the good news.  
We tried to heal disease and sickness.  
We tried to care for the one in need.  
We tried to make things better for others.

Because one day it's all going to come to an end.  
It won't last.

But what will matter is that we tried,  
in the power of God's Spirit, to live after the pattern set by Jesus,

to live in Christ, knowing we are God's beloved children,  
and that somehow God's power will win the day in the end,  
it will transform everything.

According to Brennan Manning, sometimes that might mean giving offence.

[SLIDE] He says, "Today Christianity is largely inoffensive; this kind of religion will never transform anything. Jesus Christ the master revolutionary offended the religious and political order of Palestine. Christians too are bound to offend, and if we do not it is a bad sign-we cannot be very revolutionary".

Let's not make our goal to go out and give offence!

But let's try to live out the message of the cross in the power of God.

Let's not be put off by setbacks.

Let's keep on trying.

We have the power of God.

We're still in the game.

So let's see our church and community transformed.

For God's sake.

In the name of God, the Great Love, the Crucified and Risen Christ. Amen.