

1Corinthians 1:18-25

"Iron Sharpens Iron"

I heard this story one time about a Jewish rabbinical student who took a trip to the Holy Land during his summer break. There he was, sitting in a café in Jerusalem, having a cup of coffee when a stranger walks up to him and asks, "Are you Jewish?" The rabbinical student says, "Well, yes." The stranger quickly replies, "Great! Do you wanna fight?!" (pause) There is an idea found in Jewish culture which says, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). Culturally, Jewish people are encouraged to talk about, discuss and even argue about what they believe. It's an idea that goes all the way back to Deuteronomy.

"And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your hearts; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you will rise" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

Okay. Please help me out with this one. From an early age we are taught there are two things we should not talk about in public. Those two things are politics and (pause) religion. But Christ tells us we are to be, "**wise as serpents and**

innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16). In this morning's passage Paul is asking, "Where is the wise man?" "Where is the debater of this age" (1 Cor 1:20)? Proverbs tells us to lean not on our own understanding, and instead trust in the Lord (Proverbs 3:5). How are we to trust in the Lord if we cannot figure out what God is saying? If we want change in our lives, in our church and in our community we must stop relying on the folly of trusting our own reason and understanding. We must pray and read the Scriptures for ourselves, and then we must be willing to talk about Scripture and debate what we have come to understand.

Let me put this into perspective. We have 317 people on the membership roll for Central United Methodist Church. Last year we averaged 87 in worship. Split between two adult small groups and one children's small group we averaged 25 people in Sunday school. Is this what Moses and Paul had in mind? Do you think this is what Jesus had in mind when Jesus commanded, "**Go, therefore and make disciples**" (Matt 28:19)? (pause) In order to be effective at making disciples we have to be more effective at becoming disciples. (pause) Our metal must be tested. The metal of our faith in Jesus Christ must be hammered; honed; sharpened and tested.

Sisters and brothers do we understand this morning's passage? Do we know what Paul is talking about when Paul says, "It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1Cor 1:21)? Let me ask it this way, and all of y'all please help me out. How do you know who wins a NASCAR race? (pause) How do you know who wins a boxing match? (pause) How do you know which side has won a battle? (pause) Good. Right. Now, Yes or no. Yes or no, Church, do people come back from the dead? (pause) Outside of a horror movie, do people come back from the dead? (pause) In the end did Jesus escape from the Jewish authorities and the Romans? (pause) Are winners usually beaten, scourged, spat upon and crucified? (pause) **Jesus did not** lead an army to overthrow the Roman military and free the land God promised to Israel's descendants. **Jesus did not** sit on a throne in Jerusalem to govern the kingdom God promised to David. **Jesus did not** destroy those who wanted to arrest and kill Him. **Jesus did not** successfully escape from the Jews and the Romans. Jesus was arrested, beaten, spat upon, made fun of, canned, scourged, publicly exposed and crucified. Jesus died. By the world's standards Jesus lost, and Jesus lost big. By the world's standards Jesus is a (pause) loser. It is foolishness to believe Jesus is the hero of the Gospel. (pause)

And yet, I believe it. I believe it. I believe Jesus is not just the hero of the world. I believe Jesus is the hero of EVERYTHING! Jesus' death paid the price for all of my sins. Jesus' death paid the price for my willful disobedience to God, and for all of the ways my selfishness has hurt me, the ones I love, and anyone else. Jesus' death on the cross paid the price for all of your sins too. Jesus' resurrection makes our salvation possible.

Sisters and brothers do we understand this foolishness? Do we really? Do we really understand why Jesus had to die so that we might live free from the fear and doubt of the consequences for our transgressions and our mistakes? (pause) Do we understand it? (pause) Have we wrestled it out? (pause) I heard it said one time that you don't really know something unless you can teach it. You don't really know something unless you can teach it. (pause) Can we? (pause) Do we understand what Paul is talking about in this passage well enough to be able to explain it to another adult? Do we understand this passage well enough to be able to explain it to a five-year-old? (pause)

I know not everyone here is into doing homework. I know not everyone here likes to do a lot of reading. I know for some people reading the Bible is difficult. I know that because I was one of them. I used to have a hard time reading Scripture, but here's the thing. Most of the people in the first century were illiterate. Most of the people in the first century could not read. So what did they do? How did they learn about what was in Scripture? How did they learn to rely on God's Word? (pause) They talked about it. They first heard it from their mothers. Have y'all heard this joke? Why are so many doctors Jewish? (pause) Because their mothers are. The Moms would get together with the children and do laundry, or make clothes or cook and they would keep their children nearby. The mothers would recite the Torah to their sons and daughters. Their sons and daughters would recite the Torah back to their mothers. If a child got one word or one syllable wrong there was a mother in the room to set them straight. These children grew up memorizing, and reciting Scripture until their bar mitzvah/bat mitzvah where they would be expected to be able to talk about what they knew and how they would live out their Jewish faith. The Jews debated their faith. The men would debate Torah while standing at the city gates and the women would talk about Torah with each other and as they did chores around the house. They would argue and debate what is in Scripture to prove their point, or to gain leverage. Hence the Scripture from Proverbs, "iron sharpens iron."

Sisters and brothers how sharp is our iron? We live at a time in American history where there is rampant Biblical illiteracy. People don't know the Bible any more. We can't quote it. We can't talk about it. We don't know what's in there. We don't talk about God's Word in our homes. We can't talk about God's Word in our schools. Too many are either too ashamed or too scared to pray in public, and do you know why? Because they are afraid someone will ask them about what is in Scripture and they know that they don't know. They know that they don't know. We know that we don't know. How sharp is our iron? (pause) How dull have we become?

I think if we want to see a revival of life in our town, and a revival of God's Spirit in our church we have to start at the bottom with a revival of God's Spirit in our hearts. Politicians can't fix this. The government can't fix this. The guy in the funny dress up front can't fix this. We; all of us; have to put God first. Those of us who are not already in a small group, a bible study, or the Tuesday morning prayer meeting need a space to engage God's Word that is a safe space for them to engage each other. Brothers and sisters if we are going to become sharp, and useful for the building of God's Kingdom we have got to do our part. It is time to become more engaged with God's Word and with one another. It is time for each of us to find a small group or Bible study of our own.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen