

“Seeing Clearly”  
1 Corinthians 1:18-25  
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In the Bible, Paul describes the paradox - - of the Cross of Jesus - - by pointing to TWO ways of seeing things. / According to Paul there are two ways of seeing the world. / And there are two ways of seeing the cross. / These two ways are opposed. / Thus they present us with a paradox. / Because in a sense they are BOTH true. / But for Paul - - and for followers of Jesus - - one way is MORE true than the other. / A deeper truth - - is seen through faith.

These two ways of seeing - - are evident when considering the cross.

The cross is EITHER: foolishness and weakness

OR it is: wisdom and strength

If you see things in one way, through the eyes the world, the fact that Jesus was killed on a cross while at the same time being called the Messiah and savior - - makes no sense. / It is foolish the say that a Messiah savior would die a painful death - - condemned as a traitor.

Additionally - - anyone who dies in this way is clearly - - weak enough to die a miserable death - - and die defeated. / This is NOT the death of an honored conqueror - - with a funeral of great pomp - - lying in state for all to admire and remember.

So the eyes of the world see a weak - - defeated - - fool named Jesus.

But the eyes of faith see - - a strong, merciful, wise, savior.

How can both be true?

It's because there are two ways of seeing things.

And the faith way of seeing things - - is the power of God - - according to Paul.

So - - to shift gears a bit: Anyone else like the comics in the newspaper?

I bring it up because many comics through the years - - share this characteristic with Paul's description of the cross - - and the faith perspective. / They present two ways of seeing things. / That's what makes the comics funny.

Think about it...

Garfield is a talking cat. / There are no talking cats in "real life". / But no one really disputes the wisdom of Garfield - - nor rejects him because it is nonsense to believe he talks.

Garfield lets us see the world through the eyes of a cat.

It's certainly a different way of seeing the world than the one Odie the dog has!

How about the classic by Charles Schultz? "Peanuts". / Schultz presents the world as seen through the eyes of children. / Evidenced by the way grown-ups are heard speaking in the TV version - - in muffled garbled gibberish. / We don't understand them - - because they have a different way of seeing the world. / They are outside the frame of reference of the worldview of this comic strip.

More recently "Calvin and Hobbes" plays with the world as seen through the eyes of a child. / And one question of that comic strip is: which one is Hobbes, a stuffed animal - - OR - - a ferocious tiger? / Well it depends on if you see the world the way Calvin does.

In the present day, the comic strip "Rose is Rose" presents characters of all ages who go in and out of multiple ways of seeing the world. / Here each character has several frames of reference within their own head. / Rose is sometimes seen as her alter-ego: a biker in a leather jacket. / Her son Pasquale occasionally travels in his "dream ship" - - which is a space ship he drives around when he is dreaming.

The thing about "Rose is Rose" that is striking is the mostly positive attitude of the strip.

Lots of other comics get their humor from critique and sarcasm.

So if there's anything to why we like these comics it points to alternative ways of seeing.

This idea that there are alternative ways to see the world has endured.

We get it, and we like it.

But for some reason - - when it comes to faith - - we lose it.

Paul says that people who embrace the wisdom of the world are perishing.

He says that preaching about the cross can be a stumbling block.

According to Paul - - people DON'T usually understand BOTH perspectives.

IT'S EITHER the way of the WORLD - - OR - - the way of FAITH.

Paul says that God CHOSE the low and the weak and the foolish.

And that choice leaves those who see things WITHOUT faith - - with nothing.

Well as I think about what Paul wrote in this letter I have to say - - I think it is the case that sometimes our way of seeing things - - contains blind spots. / And sometimes it's pretty difficult to convince someone to see things - - as I see them.

As we think about how this idea - - about how we see things - - applies to the CROSS of Jesus, I'll ask you to consider some lines from a poem by W. H. Auden about the crucifixion. In this poem Auden paints a picture of people on the day of Jesus' crucifixion, kind of going about their business, and missing the significance of it.

W. H. Auden imagines a chilling scene on the morning of Jesus crucifixion.

This is from his extended reflection called the "seven hours", in the old devotional tradition of contemplation on the death of Jesus. / It is Friday morning, the day Jesus will be killed on a cross. / Auden imagines the scene as strikingly normal and humdrum.

Another ordinary day for most people.

It is in the ordinariness of it - - for me - - that it becomes chilling.

The scene begins as a man who Auden calls “the Hangman”, heads off to the site of the crucifixion... To paraphrase W. H. Auden:

“After shaking paws with his dog, the hangman sets off briskly over the heath.

He does not know yet who will be provided today...

Who will be provided to do the high works of Justice with?

Meanwhile - - gently closing the door to his wife’s bedroom,

with a sigh, the JUDGE descends his marble stair;

He does not know by what sentence he will apply on earth - -

- - the law that rules the stars.

And the POET - - taking a breather round his garden before starting to write,

does not know whose TRUTH he will tell.”

“Now each of us prays to an image - - of his image - - of himself:

“Let me get through this coming day,

without a dressing down from a superior,

or behaving like an ass in front of the girls.

Let something exciting happen.

Let me find a lucky coin on the sidewalk.

Let me hear a funny new story.”

At this hour - - we all - - might be anyone.”

“It is only our VICTIM who is without a wish.

It is our VICTIM who knows already that in fact our prayers are already heard.

Our victim - - who knows our prayers...

That one of us will NOT slip up...

That the machinery of our world will function without a hitch...

That today for once there will be no squabbling among the gods...”

Our victim - - who knows that by sundown we shall all have had a good Friday.”

As I read this I wondered: What is it that sometimes causes people to miss the power of the cross? / What is it that obscures the message of the cross as an act of love?

Is it the scandal of the cross that causes people to miss its power?

Is it the violence of the act of crucifixion?

Or is it - - the violence of people through the years?

The violence of people who have called themselves followers?

Can we see the good - - in bad things?

Can we see - - the blessings of a dreary day?

Can we see - - the health - - of a person facing their illness with courage?

These are questions of faith...

Questions for facing the cross - - and trying to see clearly.

In order to imagine how we might see more clearly, consider some lines from Ann Weems about going to the hospital - - or maybe it is to a Hospice room.

This is called “The Visit”.

“I went to visit her,  
but dreaded seeing  
her body cancer-filled.  
What I saw - - upon her bed  
was a small bag of yellowed skin  
full of bones.  
She faced the window  
away from the door I entered,  
and I heard her whisper  
this prayer:

“Thank you, God;

I had a nice time.”

When I first read that, I thought the woman in the bed was thanking God for her life.

Meaning that she had had a nice time on earth.

And now she was nearing the end of her life.

But then I read it again and saw something different:

Could it be that she was thanking God for time spent in prayer?

Could this woman in the bed have just concluded some time spent with God?

In concluding her prayer she says: “Thank you God, I had a nice time”

Either way, I had to think about my own life! / How do I see things?

How will I approach things when my time is near?

How do I spend time with God in prayer?