

March 7, 2021  
Third Sunday in Lent (Year B)  
“Unexpected”

**1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

<sup>18</sup>For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

<sup>20</sup>Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

For those among us with an offbeat sense of humor the phrase, “No one expects the Spanish Inquisition!” makes for happy memories. One of the things that make for comedy is an unexpected outcome. We are amused by twists and surprises as long as they aren’t threatening. Little children show us that not knowing whether to laugh or cry is a problem to be solved only through experience. Even as adults we face the option, and if we are wise chose laughter through tears as the richest of life’s experiences.

Humor is often a victim of translation. What might be funny in one language or culture seems to hold no joy for another. The Bible has many humorous stories, puns and other word play. They show up in Greek and Hebrew, but English is neither Greek nor Hebrew. For instance the camel through the eye of the needle image probably got a few chuckles when Jesus told it while we’re trying to imagine a world where such a thing happens. He could have said, “It’s very hard for a rich man to accept God’s sovereignty,” but it has no color, no funny image of trying to squeeze camels like toothpaste from a tube.

The unexpected consequence is not always funny. Many times it is tragic, but we tend to remember when what we anticipated turned out not to be. If things go according to plan our brains just file it away under business as usual. Whole days go by when nothing unexpected happens and many of us are hard pressed to remember the details of such days. Sometimes humor comes out of the unexpected outcome, but always learning ensues.

So, if God wants your attention, or even if God wants to hear you laugh, the best thing to do is meddle in the course of events and suddenly you stop to look. You stop to think. You stop. Some people complain that church is boring because it’s the same old thing week after week. We

get trained not to expect anything and that way miss all the things God is up to when the community of faith gathers. For years and years I went to church not expecting much. I thought I knew everything about Jesus, for instance, so when we first actually encountered one another I was truly amazed, perplexed and joyful. So that's what they were talking about? This fear of you was misplaced. You are as powerful as a hurricane but gentle as the mother of a new born babe.

The true power of another person is the ability to surprise you. When someone close has died in time you miss their surprises. Funerals allow us to share notes about people we love and we all find out they were both familiar and strange to us. The mystery of the other is sometimes comic and sometimes problematic, but living beings can do things. They don't always act predictably.

As much as the Messiah was anticipated by the prophets and priests they did not expect Jesus. God's plan checked all the boxes in ways that no one saw ahead. Despite the tragedy of the crucifixion – no one thought the messiah would fall victim to Roman state terrorism – they also didn't see that the end was not the end. The postscript of Easter morning was a surprise even to those who heard Jesus explain that it would happen this way. What makes you think God can't surprise you when God surprised Peter and Paul and eventually the Roman Empire.

Did God surprise you? Has God surprised you lately? There is so much to know about God that in this life we have only begun. The Westminster Catechism was written when men weren't men per say but like God created them male and female. It says the answer to, "What is the chief end of man?" is "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." There is no end to God's ability to surprise us, entice us, even make us laugh especially at ourselves.

Beware because about the time you get it all figured out God will throw a wrench in the works.

You will be amazed at what God can do.

Merciful God, in Christ you make all things new. Transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.