

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors at North Shore Alliance Church. Just before I preach this morning, I thought I would take a few minutes to give you a brief update on our staffing situation at the church.

As you know, Shane and Linda left our staff team just before Christmas and moved to Ontario. Our Elders Board has released me to begin a search process to hire both a worship pastor, and a pastor to serve in the area of adult discipleship. Please be in prayer for our search committee in the coming months, as we receive resumes, pray and discern, interview, and recommend candidates to the Board.

In the interim, we have a plan to make sure both Shane and Linda's roles are being covered off. And in fact, you've already seen part of our solution this morning because Alana has agreed to join our staff team in the interim and to give some leadership to our worship ministry.

Many of you know Alana because she grew up in this church, but if you started coming to NSAC in the past few years, then likely you don't know Alana very well. A number of years ago, we sent Alana out to New Zealand as a missionary from our church.

Specifically, Alana has been serving with the Tauranga House of Prayer...their mission is to minister before the Lord in prayer and worship, and to raise up leaders to bring the message of Jesus to every corner of the world. Over the past few years, Alana has spent time leading worship at Tauranga House of Prayer, and with a local church in New Zealand.

Just after I knew that Linda Gould would be leaving us, I heard that Alana was planning to come back to North Vancouver for a few months...I can remember saying to the Lord, "*Could it really be that easy?*" And so I'm grateful to have Alana back with us, and grateful to God for Alana's willingness to join our staff team in the interim.

Pray for Alana

In late November we started a new preaching series on Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church; our series is entitled "Rethinking Church". When I say that I've been "rethinking church," it's not that I've been questioning the importance of the church in 21st century...I'm still convinced that the local church is central to God's plan and purpose in the world.

What I have been "rethinking" is this: *what does it mean for us to be God's people here on the North Shore of Vancouver?*

- How do we live in such a way so as to cooperate with God's life, His presence, His power?
- How do we adapt to the changing world around us? The message of Jesus is timeless, but our methods are not.
- And how do we translate our "knowledge" of God into "being" and "doing"? Learning is for the sake of living...and we need an apprenticeship model of discipleship that will release us into living the life of Jesus, instead of just talking about the life Jesus led.

In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, he casts a vision of a church that's in step with the Holy Spirit, in step with one another, and living out their calling in the world. That's what I'm after in this preaching series, for me, for you, for our city, and for God.

I've entitled my message this morning "*Rethinking Wisdom*," and really, this message is part #2 of 4 that contrasts the wisdom of our world with the wisdom of God. I want to begin by reading 1 Cor. 1:18-25 for us this morning, and invite you to follow along as I read. You can find this text on page 1772.

18 The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. 19 As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent." 20 So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.

21 Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. 22 It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. 23 So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. 24 But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.¹

Throughout these verses, the question Paul seems to address is: *does the wisdom of the world help us, or hinder us, when it comes to knowing God?*

Now, I want to be careful how I talk about the wisdom of the world; it does no one any good to make sweeping generalisations. It's not as though the world is void of wisdom, or that as Christians, we alone hold wisdom in our hands. There is a lot of wisdom, knowledge, and insight to be found in this world.

Lately I've been reading Steve Job's biography and I'm astounded by the technological revolution that he was a part of in the 70's...think how far we've come. The amount of computing power available in a tiny microchip is incredible. When it comes to technology, we know more than has ever been known in the history of the world, and this advance in knowledge isn't slowing down.

Think about how much doctors and scientists have discovered about the human body, about cells, organs, disease, and prevention. I'm told that if Terry Fox had been living today, the kind of cancer that claimed his life would have been easily treatable.

This world is not void of wisdom, knowledge, or insight; there is much that can be discovered. I've heard it said that, "all wisdom is God's wisdom". I believe this to be true, but, what happens when humanity becomes so "wise" in their own eyes that they forget the God who created them?

¹ 1 Cor. 1:18-25, New Living Translation.

The pursuit of wisdom, when divorced from the pursuit of God, leads to a world with humanity at the centre...a world that no longer recognizes God's rightful place in it.

King David once wrote, "*The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God,'*"² but there is more than one kind of fool. What do we call the person who knows there is a God but does not heed His wisdom? What do we call the person who recognizes God but refuses to accept His thoughts, His ways, and His plans? At least in part, the curse of sin and pride is that we tend to think that we know more, see more, and understand more than we really do.

Just before Christmas, Dave preached on vs. 18-25, reminding us that through the cross, God has turned the wisdom of the world on it's head. The philosophers, the scholars, the brilliant debaters, in their great "wisdom," completely missed what God was doing to save the world. Their best thinking precluded the possibility of God's solution: the cross.

God's wisdom was shocking in that He presented the world with a crucified Messiah as the key to triumph over sin, death, and the devil. Through the weakness and suffering of God the Son, Jesus, humanity has been presented with a way to be restored to God the Father.

In 1 Cor. 1:26-31, Paul continues to address the following question: *does the wisdom found in the world help us, or hinder us, when it*

comes to knowing and experiencing God? And so, if your bibles are still open, please follow along with me as I read.

*"26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."*³

In two texts I've read this morning, there is a word that pops up again and again; it's the word "foolishness". The Greek word is "moria;" it's from this Greek root that we derive the English word "moron".

Some, in their own "wisdom," consider the cross to be the height of foolishness and weakness...it's for morons...but God has revealed that the death and the resurrection of Jesus is His only plan to save and restore humanity.

Let those who are truly wise among us accept that God is wiser by far than we; He sees everything as it truly is. The cross of Jesus

² Psalm 14:1, New International Version.

³ 1 Cor. 1:26-31, New International Version.

becomes for us the “wisdom of God,” the lens through which we see all of life.

illus: I’m going to need a little help to make what I’ve been saying plain; **can I borrow someone’s glasses for a moment?** One author writes, “A world-view is like a pair of glasses--everything we see in the world is seen through their lenses; they shape what we see, so that we ‘interpret’ the world in a particular way. It is normally such a natural part of us that we are unaware of it.”⁴

When we submit control of our lives to Jesus, we are included in God’s family, and it is as though we take off one set of glasses and don another. In light of the weakness of the cross, new things need to be valued, and old things need to pass away.

Being “wise” in the eyes of society, being a person of power or influence, being a person of significant social standing...people chase after these things. And these pursuits dull us to the way of Jesus, where our weakness, brokenness, and sin must be named and submitted to the One who died in our place.

In vs. 26-31, Paul continues to talk about the “foolishness” of the cross, but now shines the spotlight on God’s church. In essence, Paul writes, “If some think the cross is foolish and unimpressive, God’s people are equally unimpressive!”

“*Brothers and sisters,*” Paul writes, “*think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.*” Just as God overturned human wisdom when He chose the cross, He continues to overturn human expectation by the kinds of people He chooses to join His family and to be His witnesses.

The Church at Corinth, wasn’t composed of the Caesar’s of the world. The rockstars, the leading nobility, the philosophical elite...not many of these were found in the church, largely because they didn’t have room for a crucified Messiah at the centre of their lives.

“*Think of what you were when you were called,*” writes Paul, **and**, think of why. Think about it...were we invited into God’s family because He was in need of our wisdom or strength? Were we called because God was lacking expertise or skill? Of course not.

The church is God’s new community, His people; **we** are the place where God now dwells by His Spirit. We’ve been chosen, not because we are impressive in wisdom, power, or nobility, not because of what we bring to God, but simply because He is a God who loves. In choosing the unimpressive, God has made known forever that He is a God of matchless grace.⁵

illus: I suspect I’m not alone in this, but I’ve found that with small children, you end up having certain conversations over and over again. When children are small, they ask the same questions, they

⁴ John Coles, *Developing a Healing Ministry: A Training Manual For Churches*, 18.

⁵ Richard Hayes, *Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, 1 Corinthians*, 32.

want the same stories told and re-told...it's how they learn, it's how they remember. And some of the conversations we have with children shape how a child perceives themselves and their place in the world.

Every so often, Anna will come up to me and ask: "*Daddy...am I special?*" And I will tell her a story I have told her many times before. "*Oh Anna, you are so, so, so special...to me, you're the most special little girl in the whole world.*" And without fail, Anna will ask, "*And mommy too?*" "*Yes, and mommy too.*"

Sometimes that is enough for Anna, and other times Anna wants to hear more. "*Daddy, why am I so special?*" And I will begin to tell her the rest of the story. "*Anna you are so, so, so special because God made you...and we are so thankful that God gave you to mommy and I.* And without fail, Anna will add, "*And Luke too?*" "*Yes, and Luke too.*" With Naomi and I, it's not an adoption thing...we are so thankful to God for the gift of our children.

After telling Anna that she is special because God made her, I'll usually tell her some of the things I love about her. "*Anna, I love that you have such a kind heart, that you quick to help others. Anna, I love it when you sing around the house. You are such a smart girl, so beautiful,*" and on I will go.

When I tell and re-tell this story to Anna, I am speaking the truth; she is so, so, so special.. And you can just see the smile on her face as she listens to me tell her why she is valuable and precious to God, and to me.

As a pastor, I've sat with dozens and dozens of people who would likely tear up over the story I've just told about my daughter, but they would struggle to believe the same story if I told it about them.

When we are wrestling with identity questions, questions about our value and worth, all too often we end up striving in all the wrong ways and in all the wrong directions. We chase after things like wisdom, power, and status simply because we don't feel like we are "enough" without them.

We've been made in God's image, we have been beautifully and wonderfully made, but when we get out of sync with the Father's opinion of us, when His voice gets drowned out, we begin to seek out the approval of others. No one can live without approval, we've been made for it, and apart from regular doses of the Father's approval...we do what it takes to get it somewhere, anywhere, else.

I've met successful, influential, and "important" people in my life, and some of them are among the most insecure people I've ever met. If you get a crowd of "important" people together in a room, inevitably, posturing begins to break out...people start telling stories of achievements, successes, each story better than the last...we boast out of insecurity and fear.

But God's perfect love casts out the need for fear; at the cross, God made it perfectly clear what He thinks of you: in His estimation, we were worth dying for. And when this reality finally pierces our thick head and heart, we can stop wrestling, stop striving, and stop boasting. Confronted by the love of God, we don't to waste our breath trying to convince others that we matter. At the cross, Jesus

demonstrated the full extent of His love, when He gave His life for our sake.

I know it sounds too good to be true...that why they call it the gospel, the “good news”.

The church at Corinth had a bit of a boasting problem...I can't say for certain whether it was insecurity or pride. But either way, they were quite taken with themselves, impressed with their own spiritual maturity, and impressed with their own spiritual gifts. With all of their boasting, they were sounding just like the philosophers, the scholars, and the brilliant debaters in Corinth.

But boasting doesn't have any place in the church; not that kind of boasting anyways. Because of what Jesus has done, delighting in power, influence, and status no longer makes any sense. It doesn't make any sense to boast about the life we have with God as though God chose us because He was impressed with us.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “**8** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—*
9 *not by works, so that no one can boast.*” God chose us at the height of our sin and shame, and in doing so, His matchless grace is set ablaze for everyone to see. Paul tells us in vs. 29 that God called us at our worst, “*so that no one may boast before him.*”

All of us stand before God empty handed; there is nothing anyone can bring to make themselves worthy. And for this reason, we don't have to worry that we alone don't have what it takes...no one does...no one earns their standing before God. In verse 30, Paul writes, “**30**

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus”...His love is the determining factor.

The cross has forever turned “wisdom” on it's head; the cross gives us a new way of seeing God, seeing ourselves, and seeing what is valuable and praiseworthy.

Paul concludes in vs. 31 by quoting from Jeremiah 9:23-24.

“**23** *This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, **24** but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the LORD.*”

"If you are going to boast," says Paul, "at least boast about something worthwhile...boast about the Lord Jesus and His cross!" For the cross is God's wisdom made manifest...through the cross Jesus became our right standing, our holiness, and our redemption."

If we feel the need to boast, we should boast about the riches of God's love...we should boast about the way Jesus stared death in the face...we should boast about how He mocked the grave when He rose from the dead. “*“Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”*”

Pray

Invitation to the Table: This morning I want to invite you to the Lord's Table; it is a table of fellowship, a family table. If you have received the forgiveness Jesus offers, if you have named Him the

Lord of your life, then you are a part of God's family and you are welcome at this table.

Friends, the bread represents the body of Jesus...we break this bread remembering that His body was broken for us. And the cup represents the spilled blood of Jesus...His blood was poured out for our sake.

Each of us comes empty-handed this morning...we are here because of God's invitation...because of His love and grace. May His love fill and sustain you! May His grace overwhelm you! God held nothing back when He gave us His Son...and even now Jesus wants to meet you, to forgive you, to strengthen, and bless you.

Stop running, stop wrestling, stop striving and come...come and receive from the fullness of Jesus' life.

At this point I'd like to invite the servers to come forward, and the worship team to come and join me on stage. When the team begins to play, I'd like to invite you to come forward and receive the bread and the cup. Please tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and then eat with gladness, for great is God's love for you.

Benediction/Prayer Ministry