

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
“We Make the Road by Walking: Being Illogical”
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Proverbs 8:32-36; John 1:1-6

You, yes, you can control the weather. I know that sounds pretty amazing, yet in a recent interview, a politician turned theologian said that we could control the weather. Now I know that many of you are asking yourselves, how can we do this. I would love to be able to make it rain only at night, sort of like Camelot, so how do I go about it? The answer according to the author is that we can control the weather if we live perfectly according to God’s will. That’s right, if we live perfectly according to God’s will, God will do whatever it is that we ask. Thus, politician turned theologian intoned, we will be able to control the weather. What this also means is that we can control nature such that there are no more hurricanes, earthquakes and the like. In fact, this individual has said on numerous occasions, that all of the misfortunes to befall our nation, floods and the like, have happened because we have not been faithful to God.

Some of you I realize, may be a bit unconvinced, perhaps even skeptical, because this does not appear to be Biblical. Yet, in some ways it is, if we look directly at what scholars have called Wisdom in the Old Testament, a bit of which we read in our first lesson this morning. Now just to be sure that we are all on board let me explain Wisdom. Wisdom, according to scripture, is not simply having good judgment, or applying what we have learned to make smarter choices. Instead Wisdom is a part of God...a creation perhaps of God. In the middle of Proverbs 8, a little before our reading we hear, *“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.”* In other words, Wisdom is the essence of how God wants the world to work. And the way wisdom works is that when one lives wisely, or how God wants you to live, you are rewarded. When one lives opposite God’s wisdom, one is punished. As we read, *“For whoever finds me, wisdom, finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. But those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death.”* Thus if we live wisely we can get from God exactly what we want...including controlling the weather.

In some ways, I have to say, this seems logical...it is the way the world works. After all, at work, when we do well we expect to be rewarded. We expect a raise, a promotion, a bonus or at least a pat on the back. When we do something nice for someone else we expect a thank you, or I appreciate that. When we show love to our children, spouse or significant other we expect that love will be returned. On the other hand, at work, when we mess up, when we do not do our jobs, when we do not follow the rules, we expect there to be negative consequences. We expect a demotion, a fine or some other painful event. When we bring harm rather than good, we expect that there will be punishment, or condemnation. When we are mean to our children, we ought to expect little if nothing from them, except dislike. This is the way the world works. This is the logical way of things. So why shouldn’t we expect God to work the same way? Why shouldn’t we expect God to be logical? This is the heart of the Wisdom tradition. This is what proverbs implies. This is what our politician turned theologian believes. Which is great except for one little thing, and that is that according to the Gospel of John, Jesus turns this entire idea on its head, meaning Jesus comes as illogical Wisdom.

First Jesus comes as Wisdom. The Gospel of John opens with John’s account of creation. In this account he speaks of the Word being in the beginning with God and being God. An easy way to translate

this text would be see that the Word equals Wisdom equals Jesus; thus in the beginning was the Word that was Wisdom that was Jesus. This echoes Proverbs where we read that Wisdom was in the beginning with God as the very first of God's creation. John wants his readers to make this connection between the Word and Wisdom and Jesus. He wants them to see that just as Wisdom was an essential part of God showing people how to live according to the will of God, so is the Word and so is Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is the one in whom the world will see what it means to live according to the will of God. At first glance this might then say that it is now Jesus who does the logical thing; the one who rewards or punishes us according to how well we live...except this is not what is at the heart of the Gospel of John...or Jesus' ministry. Jesus comes instead as illogical wisdom.

Jesus is illogical Wisdom because Jesus does not offer the love and grace of God based on one living perfectly according to the will of God. We see this illogical wisdom when Jesus forgives people who do not deserve to be forgiven; people who have been caught in adultery, or who have cheated others, or who have betrayed their nation. We see this illogical wisdom when Jesus chooses his followers which include people who have problems with anger management, who do not understand him, who fight for place of privilege and who will betray him. We see this illogical wisdom when Jesus teaches his followers to forgive seventy times seven, to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them. We see this illogical wisdom when Jesus forgives those who crucify him. Jesus' illogical wisdom is one that as John puts it at the end of Chapter one, allows us to know that "...from Jesus' fullness we have all received grace upon grace. The Law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." This is the illogical wisdom of God that called Abraham, that freed a slave people, that brought people back from exile and that sent the only Son into the world to save everyone and not simply those who were above average.

The challenge for us is that we are to be people who live by this illogical wisdom. As Jesus puts it we are to love our enemies, pray for those who persecute us, give to all in need, forgive more times than we can count and otherwise be illogical...giving people not what they deserve but what grace provides. This is never easy because our tendency is to judge; it is to hold people to higher standards than we hold ourselves. We want to use logic rather than illogic as the basis for our interactions with others. Yet Jesus calls us to be those who offer illogical grace instead.

On this fifteenth anniversary of 911 my mind has been returning to the images that will be forever embedded in my mind. One of them is of the people running away from the buildings; away from the dust and terror that were there. They were doing the logical thing; running from harm. The other image I carry is of the first responders who rushed toward the burning towers. Their actions were illogical. They were rushing into buildings which might not stand. They were rushing in risking their lives. And they were doing so in order to save people whom they had never met; who might not be citizens; who might not be nice people; who might not be ethically upright people; who might not deserve the lost life of these responders. Yet in they went. It was illogical wisdom that sent them; wisdom that said those people in the building were worth saving because they simply were.

This is our task; to live by illogical wisdom. It will not allow us to control the weather, but it will allow us to help others see that they are beloved of God; that they are precious and that their lives matter. My challenge to you then is this, to ask, how am I living by illogical wisdom in such a way as to show God's amazing grace to all that I meet?