

Maumee Watershed District Lent 2018 'Faithful to the End' #3  
"Faithful – Against The Odds"

2 Corinthians 11:16-18, 23-29

*26 Let me come back to where I started--and don't hold it against me if I continue to sound a little foolish. Or if you'd rather, just accept that I am a fool and let me rant on a little.*

*I've worked much harder, been jailed more often, beaten up more times than I can count, and at death's door time after time. I've been flogged five times with the Jews' thirty-nine lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I've been shipwrecked three times, and immersed in the open sea for a night and a day. In hard traveling year in and year out, I've had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert sun and sea storm, and betrayed by those I thought were my brothers.*

Wise people make calculated risks. They consider the odds before they make the investment – time, money, energy, reputation. You want to know, 'Is the cost worth the cause? Is the reward worth the risk?' Think of these odds –

Las Vegas has terrible odds; you might as well just hand them your money. Slot machines are twice as bad as roulette tables. The lottery is even worse. The odds are you are more likely to visit the moon than win the jackpot. In fact, you are six times more likely to be struck by lightning than to win the lottery. If you drive 10 miles in Toledo to buy your lottery ticket you are more likely to be killed in your car than to win the lotto. Save you money and your life!

Here are the odds on how you will die: Dying in a car wreck is one in 100. That you will die in a fire one in 800. That you will die of electrocution one in 5000. That you will die in a flood one in 30,000 or a tornado one in 60,000. That you will die by a venomous snake bite or bee sting one in 100,000. That you will be struck by lightning is one in 2.8 million. By the way the person who holds the world record for times being struck by lightning the most times is Roy Sullivan, a forest ranger who has been struck seven times. He has no hair and answers to the name Matilda!

The odds of dying from food poisoning are one in 3 million (I thought it would be higher). The odds of being in a plane with a bomb are 1 in 13 million – I will try to remember that the next time I fly! Sometimes it seems the odds are against you.

Think of Paul in this passage – shipwrecked, beaten with rods, thrown into prison, fighting robbers and foes, arguing with church people. When you read his odds what would you say about him? There is a four letter word - *Dumb!* The odds are against him. Paul even calls himself dumb. He says – *...just accept that I am a fool and let me rant on a little.* Why does he do these things?

**Mission** - I want to encourage you to be part of one of our mission trips this year. We are planning VIM trips to Florida or Texas for hurricane relief and also to Eastern Kentucky to help the underprivileged in that area. . We will probably be rebuilding houses or trailers. Both of these trips give us opportunity to build relationships with people we would probably not otherwise meet and give us opportunity to serve in Christ's name and make a difference in many

lives. I would cherish the times we could work and serve together and get to know each other better.

Foolish – Dumb? Give up vacation time, a few hundred of your hard earned dollars, work in muck and falling down stuff, away from my soft bed? Some would say so. Will you encounter shipwrecks, beatings with rods, imprisonment – probably not. Will you please God and serve others and have a blast working and playing with other people? I believe so. Will some think you are dumb? Probably. Why do we do this, why did Paul do this?

The Greek culture of the time was of philosophers, orators, learned people, play writes and actors. For entertainment and cultural sophistication people would come to the theaters to watch and listen. These dramas were the rave of the time. The actors would costume and wear the masks. In each play there would be a hero, an antagonist – a bad person, and a fool. Kind of like today the hero wears white and the bad person wears black and the fool is easily identified. They are the ones who walk into the empty house where Freddy Krueger is ready to do them in. We all sit there and say, 'No dummy don't go in there!' But they do and we say, 'that was dumb'.

This is Paul. Paul put on the fools mask as he talks to those who criticize Christ and his ministry for Christ. He is the fool, they are the audience who accuse him of being foolish – for following this Christ who foolishly died on the Cross, who speaks of forgiveness for whom they think there should be none, who speaks of dependence on the wisdom of God rather than the Greek philosophers and smart guys. They root for the masked intellect. Paul writes, *Since you sit there in the judgment seat observing all these shenanigans, you can afford to humor an occasional fool who happens along.*

See, they don't get why Paul does what he does. Why does He preach about this Jesus guy who died on a Cross? Why does he risk life and limb to travel to unknown places to preach the foolishness of sacrifice? All these powerful intellects are against him. He earlier wrote, *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

How do we do this? When the odds are against us, what do we do?

**1. Turn to God.** Look up, not in. Remember Paul before Christ? He is on a mission to hunt down and destroy every person who believes in Jesus. He thinks they are fools, his brain tells him nothing of Jesus makes sense. Jesus does not match his definition of a savior; his theology is all about what is inside his warped brain. Then he meets Jesus – on the Damascus Road, in a blinding flash of light, in an audible voice – *'Paul, why do you persecute me?'* He turns to God. He receives forgiveness and begins to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit directing his life.'

When the odds are against us, we must turn to God to pray. When your job is on the line, when you're loved is sick or dying, when the love has run out on your marriage, when your kid is out of control, turn to God first.

And listen to God. We have a tendency to listen to others; many of whom give bad advice. We tend to turn to God as the last resort; to pray when all else fails. I say we should pray before we fail – or succeed. Don't let an impossible situation intimidate you. Let it motivate you to look to

God and pray. Pray more, pray consistently, pray through the intimidation and impossibilities. *God is faithful to you; faithful to the end.*

**2. Remember God's faithfulness.** Paul remembers all the shipwrecks and beatings. But he survived them all. God rescued him – not from the pain but from death. His days were numbered but not complete. God empowers him each day to do his mission of spreading the Gospel.

He writes, *At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands.*  
(2 Corinthians 11:32-33)

One of the names the Hebrews had for God was *Jehovah Nissi – the God who protects you*. Paul understood this – time, after time, after time.

How has God helped you, protected you? Your car is skidding on the ice, the truck is coming your way, you cry out – you are uninjured. That job you needed – and you got it. The spouse you married 'way up' to get! The baby the doctor said would never happen. The phone call you needed at the time. The person who told you God will forgive you. The message of unconditional love. That is God coming into your life when the odds were all against you. *God is faithful to you; faithful to the end.*

**3. Tell God how you feel.** God I feel like a fool. Everyone is against me – job, family, friends, the bank.

You think you can power out of it - but by Tuesday you're done, out of energy, motivation, stamina. The newspaper shows more people murdered, more houses foreclosed on, more factory layoffs, more school threats, more divorces, more cancer. Tell God.

I think someone wrote it to tell God how they felt in this poem:

*The world had a hopeful beginning - But people spoiled it all by sinning  
We trust that the story - Will end in God's glory - But right now the other side's winning.*

Tell God. It doesn't matter if you are powerless, God is powerful. Tell God. The Bible says, *Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with* (James 5:16). *God is faithful to you; faithful to the end.*

**4. Listen and Do what God says.** What is foolish to you, to others, to the world, is not to God.

Paul wrote: *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are...* (1 Corinthians 1:25-28).

A child born in an animal feeding stall becoming the Savior of the world? A simple carpenter crafting the Gospel? An itinerate preacher healing lepers, cripples and the blind. A man accused

of blasphemy dying on a cross bringing redemption to the world? Foolishness? No, the wisdom and power of God.

And how about you? Are you a **fool or fool for Christ?** There are foolish things we do, but there are many things the world says are foolish that are really the power and wisdom of God.

One cold and misty fall morning in 2009, 22 people traveled to London to meet Nicholas Winton. All were in their 70s - 80s. They could have been home under their afghans but this was not a social trip. They came to thank the man who saved their lives and families – a stooped 100 year old who met them on a train platform, just as he had done in 1939.

He was a 29 year old stockbroker at the time. Hitler's armies were ravaging Czechoslovakia, tearing families apart, sending parents to concentrations camps, leaving children behind. Winton got wind of the children's plight and resolved to help them. He used his vacation to travel to Prague, where he met parents, who incredibly were willing to entrust their children's future to his care. After returning to England he worked his regular job on the stock exchange by day and advocated for the children at night. He convinced Great Britain to permit their entry. He found foster homes and raised funds. Then he scheduled his first transport on March 14, 1939 and accomplished seven more over the next five months. His last trainload of children was on August 2, bringing the total of rescued children to 669. On September 1, the biggest transport was to take place, but Hitler invaded Poland and Germany closed the borders. None of the 250 children on the train were ever seen again.

After the war Winton didn't tell anyone of his rescue efforts, not even his wife. In 1988 she found a scrapbook in their attic with all the children's photos and a complete list of names. She prodded him to tell the story. As he did, rescued children have returned to say thank you. The grateful group includes a film director, a Canadian journalist, a news correspondent, a former minister in the British cabinet, a magazine manager, and one of the founders of the Israel Air Force. Today there are some 7000 children, grandchildren and grandchildren who owe their existence to Winton's bravery.

When the odds are against us what do we do? ***Turn to God. Remember His faithfulness. Tell God how you feel. Do what God says.*** Take a risk. Was Winton a fool to take on Hitler – or a fool for Christ? 7000 people will tell you.