

**I Corinthians 1:18-31**

**January 29, '17**

**“AN UPSIDE DOWN WORLD”**

**A FEW YEARS AGO, A GAP STORE IN VANCOUVER GOT A LOT OF PUBLICITY WITH A MARKETING TACTIC TO PROMOTE A NEW IDEA.**

**OVERNIGHT, THEY TURNED THE STORE UPSIDE DOWN – QUITE LITERALLY.**

**THEY HAD 32 MANNEQUINS HANGING FROM THE CEILING, ALONG WITH HUNDREDS OF SWEATERS.**

**THEY OVERTURNED 4 DISPLAY TABLES.**

**POSTERS IN THE WINDOWS WERE UPSIDE DOWN AS WAS THE “GAP” SIGN IN FRONT.**

**MIRRORS WERE BROUGHT IN THAT MADE YOU SEE YOURSELF UPSIDE DOWN.**

**SHOPPING BAGS WERE PRINTED WITH THE NAME “GAP” UPSIDE DOWN.**

**THEY WENT SO FAR AS TO HAVE THREE PARKED CARS DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE STORE – ALL UPSIDE DOWN.**

**A HOT DOG STAND ON THE SIDEWALK – UPSIDE DOWN.**

**IT'S A BIT DISORIENTING TO SEE THINGS LIKE THAT.**

**IT UPSETS THINGS AS WE'RE ACCUSTOMED TO SEEING THEM.**

**I HAD ALL SORTS OF IDEAS RUN THROUGH MY MIND AS I THOUGHT ABOUT SUCH A THEME FOR TODAY BUT AS CLOSE AS I COULD COME TO PULLING IT OFF WITHOUT DISORIENTING ALL OF YOU WAS TO HELP RON SPROATT PUT OUR SERMON TITLE UPSIDE DOWN ON THE SIGN OUT FRONT.**

**A FEW WEEKS AGO, I CHECKED OUT A BOOK AT WILLARD LIBRARY THAT HAD ONE OF THE WEIRDEST COVERS I’VE EVER SEEN.**

**IT’S TITLED “BUT WHAT IF WE’RE WRONG? THINKING ABOUT THE PAST AS IF IT WERE THE PRESENT.”**

**THE TITLE & THE BOOK ARE UPSIDE DOWN & BACKWARDS.**

**THE LIBRARIAN, WHEN TRYING TO SCAN IT, SAID IN FRUSTRATION, *“EVERY TIME I TRY TO SCAN THIS BOOK, I GET CONFUSED!”***

**WE GET CONFUSED & DISORIENTED WHEN THINGS ARE UPSIDE DOWN.**

**THE HYMNAL I USUALLY USE HERE IN THE CHANCEL IS LIKE THAT.**

**IT WAS PRINTED BACKWARDS & UPSIDE DOWN &  
WHEN WE DISCOVERED IT IN ONE OF THE PEWS, I  
DECIDED THAT, RATHER THAN JUST THROW IT AWAY,  
I'D USE IT MYSELF & PUT MINE OUT IN THE PEWS SO  
AS NOT TO CONFUSE A DIFFERENT PERSON EACH  
WEEK.**

**EVEN AFTER USING IT WEEK IN AND WEEK OUT, I  
WOULD STILL FORGET & OPEN IT BACKWARDS.**

**IT'S HARD TO ADJUST TO THINGS NOT BEING THE  
WAY WE EXPECT THEM TO BE OR WANT THEM TO BE.**

**UPSETTING THE STATUS QUO CAN BE  
THREATENING.**

**THAT'S WHAT THIS PASSAGE IN I CORINTHIANS IS  
ABOUT THIS MORNING.**

**IT'S ABOUT THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS  
UPSETTING THE STATUS QUO.**

**IT'S ABOUT THE CLAIMS OF JESUS CHRIST  
TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN – OR, MORE  
APPROPRIATELY – RIGHT SIDE UP BECAUSE THE  
WORLD AS IT IS, IS NOT THE WAY GOD INTENDS IT TO  
BE.**

**IT'S NOT JUST THE PARTICULAR PASSAGE THAT  
WE'VE READ THIS MORNING.**

**ALL THREE LECTIONARY READINGS HAVE THE  
SAME MESSAGE.**

**THE OLD TESTAMENT READING IS FROM MICAH  
AND INCLUDES THE WORDS ON THE COVER OF OUR  
BULLETIN & THE WORDS WE USED IN THE CALL TO  
WORSHIP – *“WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU  
BUT TO DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS & WALK HUMBLY  
WITH YOUR GOD.”***

**DOING JUSTICE, LOVING KINDNESS & WALKING  
HUMBLY WITH GOD ARE ACTS THAT TURN THE  
WORLD UPSIDE DOWN BECAUSE THAT'S NOT THE  
WAY THE WORLD OPERATES.**

**THE GOSPEL LECTIONARY READING IS PERHAPS  
THE MOST UPSIDE DOWN PASSAGE IN THE ENTIRE  
BIBLE.**

**IT'S THE OPENING WORDS OF THE SERMON ON  
THE MOUNT – VERSES WE REFER TO AS THE  
BEATITUDES.**

***BLESSED ARE THE POOR,***

***BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN,***

***BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY,***

***BLESSED ARE THE MEEK,***

***BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL,***

***BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS,***

***BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR DOING GOOD.***

**ALONG WITH THE MAGNIFICAT OF MARY THAT WE LOOKED AT DURING ADVENT, THESE MAY BE THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY WORDS IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE.**

**THEY ARE WORDS SPOKEN BY JESUS AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY – WORDS DESIGNED TO TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN – OR RIGHT SIDE UP & BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN BEFORE SIN ENTERED IN & TURNED IT ALL UPSIDE DOWN.**

**PAUL, IN THIS PASSAGE IN I CORINTHIANS, HAS GRABBED HOLD OF WHAT JESUS WAS SAYING.**

**HE TELLS US HOW THE WORLD LOOKS AT THE CROSS AS “FOOLISHNESS.”**

**THE WORD THAT IS USED HERE HAS, AS ITS FOUNDATION, THE WORD FOR “MORONIC.”**

**THEREFORE, THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE CROSS & THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE UPSIDE DOWN WORLD JESUS CAME TO PROCLAIM ARE “MORONS.”**

**PAUL IS FINE WITH THAT LABEL.**

**PAUL IS CONTENT IN BEING REFERRED TO AS A “MORON” IF IT MEANS HOLDING FAST TO THE UPSIDE WORLD OF CHRISTIAN VALUES.**

**LATER IN THE PASSAGE, PAUL SAYS, “*GOD CHOSE WHAT IS FOOLISH (MORONIC) 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, THINGS THAT ARE NOT, TO REDUCE TO NOTHING THINGS THAT ARE...*”**



**IN ESSENCE, HE’S SAYING “*GOD CHOOSES THOSE THINGS & THOSE PERSONS WHO WILL TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.*”**

**THE ACTUAL WORDS – “*TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN*” – ARE FOUND IN SCRIPTURE.**

**APPROPRIATELY, IT’S IN A REFERENCE TO THE APOSTLE PAUL.**

**WHEN HE WAS PREACHING IN THESSALONICA WITH HIS MISSIONARY PARTNER, SILAS, SOME OF THE RELIGIOUS & COMMUNITY LEADERS WERE QUITE DISTURBED BECAUSE PEOPLE WERE ACTUALLY LISTENING TO THEM & FOLLOWING THEIR TEACHINGS.**

**IN ACTS 17:6, LUKE TELLS US THE PROBLEM THEY HAD WITH PAUL IS THAT HE WAS - AS THEY PUT IT - “*TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.*”**

**I THINK PAUL WOULD HAVE SMILED WHEN HE HEARD THE CHARGE.**

***“GUILTY AS CHARGED AND, BY THE WAY, THANK YOU FOR THE WORD OF AFFIRMATION. THAT’S EXACTLY WHAT I HAVE INTENDED TO DO.”***

**YOU SEE, THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST IS A MESSAGE WE’RE NOT ACCUSTOMED TO HEARING IN THE REAL WORLD.**

**IT’S A MESSAGE THAT RUNS ABSOLUTELY COUNTER TO EVERYTHING THE WORLD TEACHES US.**

**THE GREAT DANISH PHILOSOPHER & THEOLOGIAN SOREN KIERKEGAARD, SAID, *“CHRISTIANITY HAS TAKEN A GREAT STRIDE INTO THE ABSURD.”***

**THE TRUE MESSAGE OF CHRIST IS ABSURD!**

**IT MAKES NO EARTHLY, WORLDLY, RATIONAL  
SENSE AT ALL.**

**WHO CAN TAKE HIS TEACHINGS SERIOUSLY?!**

***“IF SOMEONE HITS YOU ON ONE CHEEK, OFFER HIM  
THE OTHER ONE TO HIT.”***

**HOW FOOLISH IS THAT?!**

***“IF SOMEONE TAKES YOUR COAT, GIVE HIM ALL  
THE REST OF YOUR CLOTHING AS WELL.”***

**THAT’S MORONIC.**

**AND THAT’S ALSO THE UPSIDE DOWN WORLD OF  
CHRISTIANITY.**

**THE WORLD THAT WE KNOW SAYS, *“IF YOU WANT  
TO BE GREAT, YOU NEED TO CLIMB TO THE TOP OF THE  
LADDER SO OTHERS WILL SERVE YOU.”***

**CHRISTIANITY SAYS, *“THE GREATEST AMONG YOU  
WILL BE YOUR SERVANT.”***

**THE WORLD SAYS, “*ACCUMULATE AS MANY TOYS AS YOU CAN.*”**

**CHRISTIANITY SAYS, “*WHAT GOOD WILL IT BE FOR A MAN IF HE GAINS THE WHOLE WORLD, YET FORFEITS HIS SOUL.*”**

**THE WORLD SAYS, “*LOOK OUT FOR NUMBER ONE.*”**

**CHRISTIANITY SAYS, “*CARRY ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS AND THUS FULFILL THE LAW OF CHRIST.*”**

**PAUL MAKES IT CLEAR IN THIS PASSAGE - THE WORLD SAYS THAT FOLLOWING CHRIST IS FOOLISHNESS.**

**IT’S FOR MORONS & FOOLS.**

**AND IT’S VERY DIFFICULT TO BE A FOOL FOR CHRIST BECAUSE, AS PAUL DISCOVERED IN THESSALONICA, THERE’S A PRICE TO BE PAID.**

**THE WORLD DOESN'T GIVE IN EASILY TO SUCH  
FOOLISHNESS.**

**THE WORLD DOESN'T WANT TO BE TURNED  
UPSIDE DOWN & WILL VIGOROUSLY FIGHT BACK.**

**WHENEVER WE SEE A MOVEMENT IN THE  
DIRECTION OF THESE THINGS –**

**- WHENEVER SOCIETY SEEM AS THOUGH IT'S  
ABOUT TO TURN UPSIDE DOWN (WHICH IS REALLY  
RIGHT SIDE UP) –**

**- WHENEVER WE SEE LOVE & KINDNESS &  
JUSTICE & EQUALITY & FAIRNESS & HUMILITY BEGIN  
TO CATCH ON –**

**- WHENEVER WE SEE THE BEATITUDES &  
VIRTUALLY ALL THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST BEGIN  
TO TAKE ROOT –**

**- WHENEVER WE SEE THE WORLD SHIFTING  
TOWARD THE WAY GOD ALWAYS INTENDED IT TO BE-  
- THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A BACKLASH BECAUSE  
IT'S A THREAT TO THE STATUS QUO.**

**IT'S TERRIBLY FRIGHTENING WHEN EVERYTHING  
YOU'VE BEEN TAUGHT BY THE WORLD IS  
THREATENED & CHALLENGED.**

**WITHOUT THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST  
INSIDE YOUR HEART, YOU CAN SO EASILY SUCCUMB  
TO THAT FEAR.**

**AND THE WAY YOU GIVE IN TO FEAR IS BY  
FIGHTING WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT.**

**YOU DO WHATEVER YOU CAN TO KEEP THOSE  
KINGDOM OF GOD CHARACTERISTICS & VALUES  
FROM TAKING ROOT & FLOURISHING.**

**THOSE FRIGHTENED PEOPLE – LIKE THE ONES  
PAUL FACED IN CORINTH & THESSALONICA – WILL  
OPPOSE THOSE “KINGDOM OF GOD VALUES” WITH  
ALL THE STRENGTH & POWER THEY STILL POSSESS.**

**THAT’S WHY IT’S SO HARD TO STAND FIRM IN  
OUR COMMITMENT TO THOSE UPSIDE DOWN  
BEATITUDE TEACHINGS OF JESUS.**

**WHEN STANLEY HAUERWAUS WAS TEACHING AT  
DUKE UNIVERSITY, HE WOULD OFTEN BEGIN ONE OF  
HIS CLASSES BY READING A LETTER FROM A PARENT  
TO A HIGH OFFICIAL.**

**THE PARENT COMPLAINED THAT THEIR SON WHO  
WAS ONCE A HIGHLY MOTIVATED AND OBEDIENT  
YOUNG MAN HAD GOTTEN INVOLVED WITH SOME  
WEIRD RELIGIOUS GROUP.**

**THE GROUP HAD COMPLETELY TAKEN OVER HIS LIFE, FORCED HIM TO FORSAKE ALL OF HIS FRIENDS, AND TURNED HIM AGAINST HIS FAMILY.**

**THE PARENT PLEADED WITH THIS OFFICIAL TO INTERVENE AGAINST THIS GROUP WHICH HAD DISRUPTED THEIR FAMILY AND CAUSED SUCH PAIN.**

**THEN HAUERWAUS WOULD ASK THE CLASS, “*WHAT IS THIS LETTER ABOUT?*”**

**THE CLASS SUGGESTIONS WERE AS WE WOULD EXPECT THEM TO BE, NAMING SEVERAL OF THE PROMINENT CULTS THAT TRY TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS.**

**AFTER SEVERAL MINUTES OF SPECULATION, HAUERWAUS WOULD REVEAL TO HIS STUDENTS THAT THE LETTER WAS A REAL LETTER & THAT IT WAS WRITTEN BY A THIRD CENTURY ROMAN PARENT**



**ABOUT A WEIRD RELIGIOUS GROUP CALLED  
“CHRISTIANS.”**

**THEY WERE TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.  
IT’S NOT REALLY MUCH DIFFERENT TODAY.**

**THE CROSS IS STILL FOOLISH & MORONIC AND TO  
TRULY FOLLOW THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST IS  
NO MORE ACCEPTABLE TODAY THAN IT WAS IN THE  
THIRD CENTURY IN ROME OR IN THE FIRST CENTURY  
IN CORINTH OR THESSALONICA.**

***“TO DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS & WALK HUMBLY  
WITH GOD” AS MICAH CHALLENGES US TO DO WILL  
STILL BE MET BY THE WORLD WITH DERISION &  
MOCKERY.***

***JUSTICE & KINDNESS & HUMILITY - THE WORLD IS  
VERY SUSPECT OF SUCH THINGS – AND IT ALWAYS  
WILL BE – UNTIL THE WORLD IS TURNED UPSIDE***

**DOWN (WHICH – REMEMBER – IS REALLY RIGHT SIDE UP).**

**LAST WEEK, I MENTIONED A CHURCH LEADER WHO CHOSE THE WORDS OF HIS CONGREGATION'S BY-LAWS OVER THE WORDS OF JESUS.**

**I'M NOT SURE IF THAT SAME GUY WAS INVOLVED, BUT I REMEMBER HEARING OF A HEATED CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO MEN IN CHURCH.**

**ONE MAN WAS SPEAKING FORCEFULLY ABOUT THE SINFULNESS OF ALCOHOL AND THE OTHER MAN SAID, *"DON'T YOU KNOW THAT JESUS DRANK WINE & ATE WITH SINNERS?"***

**THE TEETOTALER SIGHED AND SAID, *"YES, AND I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A BIT DISAPPOINTED IN JESUS FOR THAT."***

**THE WORLD WILL ALWAYS BE DISAPPOINTED IN JESUS.**

**THE WORLD WILL BE DISAPPOINTED IF THE POOR ARE LIFTED OUT OF POVERTY.**

**THE WORLD WILL BE DISAPPOINTED IF THE FOREIGNER, THE REJECTED & THE MARGINALIZED ARE WELCOMED, ACCEPTED & AFFIRMED.**

**THE WORLD WILL BE DISAPPOINTED IF THE HUNGRY ARE FED AND IF THE MEEK REALLY DO INHERIT THE EARTH AND IF THE PEACEMAKERS ARE REFERRED TO AS CHILDREN OF GOD.**

**PAUL IS TELLING US IN THESE WORDS TO THE CHRISTIANS IN CORINTH THAT FOLLOWING JESUS IS NOT AN EASY THING TO DO.**

**BUT PAUL, AS AN EVANGELIST, KNEW THAT HE HAD NO OTHER CHOICE.**

**HE COULDN'T KEEP SILENT BECAUSE LIVES WERE AT STAKE – INCLUDING THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO SO VIGOROUSLY OPPOSED HIM.**

**PAUL KNEW THAT A LIFE LIVED WITHOUT THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST WASN'T REALLY LIFE AT ALL.**

**HE KNEW THAT THOSE WHO COULDN'T ACCEPT THE “*TURN-THE-WORLD-UPSIDE-DOWN*” TEACHINGS OF JESUS WERE REALLY LIVING IN FEAR.**

**THEY WERE AFRAID OF PEOPLE WHO WERE DIFFERENT FROM THEM.**

**THEY WERE AFRAID THEIR COMFORTABLE LIFE WOULD BE UPENDED.**

**THEY WERE AFRAID THAT THE CONTROL THEY HAD HELD FOR SO LONG WOULD NO LONGER BE THEIRS.**

**BUT PAUL KNEW THAT THE FREEDOM THAT COMES WITH AN ACCEPTANCE OF THAT UPSIDE DOWN WORLD OF JESUS CHRIST WAS THE ONLY THING THAT COULD SAVE THEM FROM THE TRAGEDY OF A LIFE LIVED IN THE ENSLAVEMENT OF THOSE FEARS.**

**IT'S HARD TO CHANGE, BUT ONCE ONE HAS, IT'S EVEN HARDER TO GO BACK.**

**ONCE ONE HAS SEEN THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS UPSIDE DOWN WORLD BEING TURNED RIGHT SIDE UP, THERE'S NO TURNING BACK – NO TURNING BACK FROM THE FOOLISHNESS OF FOLLOWING JESUS CHRIST.**

**I MENTIONED, AT THE BEGINNING, THAT UPSIDE DOWN HYMNAL THAT I USE.**

**WELL, I USED IT FOR A COUPLE YEARS & FINALLY  
GOT USED TO IT & LEARNED TO OPEN IT UPSIDE  
DOWN WITH THE SINGING OF EACH HYMN.**

**SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, THOUGH, AFTER WE'D  
MOVED THINGS AROUND IN THE CHANCEL, I PICKED  
UP WHAT I THOUGHT WAS MY HYMNAL, OPENED IT  
UP AND, TO ME, IT WAS BACKWARDS & UPSIDE DOWN!**

**BY THAT I MEAN THAT IT WAS EXACTLY LIKE ALL  
THE REST OF THE HYMNALS IN THE PEWS!**

**FOR WEEKS, I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET USED  
TO IT!**

**I HAD BECOME SO ACCUSTOMED TO MY UPSIDE  
DOWN HYMNAL THAT I COULDN'T GET USED TO A  
NORMAL ONE!**

**SO THIS PAST WEEK, I SEARCHED THE CHURCH  
UNTIL I FOUND MY UPSIDE DOWN HYMNAL – THE ONE  
I’VE GROWN SO ACCUSTOMED TO USING!**

**SO IT IS WHEN WE UNDERSTAND & ACCEPT & LIVE  
OUT THE UPSIDE DOWN TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST.**

**THEY BECOME SO MUCH A PART OF US THAT WE  
CAN’T IMAGINE EVER GOING BACK.**

**WHETHER IT’S PAUL’S FOOLISHNESS OR CHRIST’S  
BEATITUDES, WE ARE CALLED TO BE GOD’S PEOPLE –  
CALLED TO SHOW HOW GOD HAS CHANGED US &  
REMADE US AS THOSE WHO LIVE OUT THE COMMAND  
FROM MICAH – *“WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF  
YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS & WALK  
HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD.”* AMEN.**

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport  
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