

Lake Shore Baptist Church
Sermon February 9, 2020 **Charlie Fuller**

Title: *The Intersection of Heaven and Earth*

Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

(Note: There are a spontaneous portions of the sermon missing from the manuscript. These are available in the audio version.)

If you've listened to my May 12 sermon from last year at First Baptist Church in Washington, DC, this story may sound familiar. This is an illustration from the same experience, but it's a very different story.

In the summer of 1988, I took my comprehensive exams for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Arizona State University. As you can imagine (some of you don't have to imagine) it was a nerve-wracking season of my life. Did I know enough? What would their questions be? How can I remain calm enough to think clearly? What do I do if I fail? I've basically bet my future and the future of my family on my success in this program. There's a bar here for me to clear and I don't know exactly where it is. How can anyone know everything there is to know about music theory, music literature, music history, choral conducting techniques?

The exam began. The first questions were easy enough. Pretty general. Pretty mundane. Then they began to ramp up the questions. They were getting into some pretty esoteric topics. I was lucky so far. I was able to at least able to participate in serious conversations on these topics.

And then it happened. My greatest fears were realized. They asked a question about which I had no clue. Nothing. Nada. Empty. They had found one of my many weak spots. I was forced to the response I had hoped with every fiber of my being to avoid. I had to say these three dreaded words:

"I don't know."

The world didn't stop on its axis. The sun was still shining. My heart was still beating. Racing, maybe, but still beating. And I passed the exam.

I learned a very important lesson that day. It's ok to say, "I don't know." In fact, sometimes it's a good thing to say, "I don't know." What I realized after the exam was over was that each of my committee members could do to each other what they collectively had done to me. None of them knew everything about music. Neither would I ever know everything about music.

Before you think that I was a fountain of great courage that day, I have a confession to make. One of my doctoral colleagues had gone before a similar committee just a few weeks earlier and tried to make up answers to questions he couldn't answer. He was

toasted and failed by his committee. I learned at least something from his experience, but it was still a struggle to say, “I don’t know.”

Of course no one knows everything, but do we always act on that truth? We would easily acknowledge that all of us have things we can learn, but are we willing to unlearn some of the assumptions that we’ve collected over the years? Can we find within ourselves the humility to truly and deeply question ourselves as we listen to others?

As we listen to God?

In today’s text Paul is addressing this very idea. Paul says he came to the people of Corinth with “weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” He talks about avoiding “lofty words or wisdom.” Acknowledging intellectual weakness would have been a revolutionary admission to an audience of Greeks, people who valued intellectual rigor, reasoning, and rhetoric above all else. The Greeks were the great thinkers of the ancient world. When Paul took this tack when working with the people of Corinth, he was taking a very subversive path, one that would likely have been viewed with disdain. And then he writes to them about the “mind of Christ.”

What in the world is the “mind of Christ?”

Here are some examples of the “mind of Christ from Jesus’s own lips: “

He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be *first* must be *last* of all and servant of all (Mark 9:35).”

Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it (Matt. 10:39).

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back (Luke 6:37-38).

We worship the Christ who fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes.

We worship the Christ who healed bodies, minds, and souls.

We worship the Christ who rose from the dead and lives today.

These are hints of what is the “mind of Christ.”

What we must acknowledge is that the mind of Christ is not the mind of humankind.

Now I want to acknowledge that seeking the mind of Christ has been used for all kinds of foolishness. In my history in the church I’ve heard people use phrases like, “stepping out in faith,” and “let go and let God.” I’ve been in multiple churches that determined that God was calling them to “step out in faith” and make financial commitments that

brought them to near-financial ruin. I know people who do the same kinds of things in their personal life.

These are people who ignored Jesus's parables about being a sly as a fox and being at least as wise as the world. Jesus doesn't tell us to check our brains at the door when we are seeking God's wisdom. That's why there is a difference between making decisions and discerning the Spirit of God. But that would be another whole sermon – or even a sermon series.

Let's acknowledge that there is a tension between using one's God-given good sense and seeking a wisdom from above that sometimes doesn't make sense. There's no secret formula to determine where the line is that separates God's wisdom from human wisdom.

God both values reason and laughs at it at the same time. It's a part of the mystery of God.

I believe personal and specifically intellectual humility is what Paul is talking about when he uses the words "mind of Christ." I believe we find this in the book of Proverbs when the author says,

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
⁸ It will be a healing for your flesh
and a refreshment for your body.
 (Proverbs 3:5-8)

There are a million examples of how the wisdom of man is but a mere shadow of the mind of Christ. Here's one to which I think we can all relate:

In the fourteenth century, English Franciscan friar, William of Ockham developed a principle for problem solving. William surmised that the simpler a solution, the more likely it was to be the *best* solution. Later scholars dubbed this principle, Ockham's Razor, a name it carries to this day.

Mathematicians (and I've checked this with Buddy Powell) will tell you that the simpler the formula, the more elegant it is. That doesn't mean that more complex formulas with the same results are wrong, it's just that they're not preferred. This probably goes back to our friend, William of Ockham.

In the post-war years of the 40's and 50's advertisers were falling all over each other to sell new products to the people of our newly prosperous country. A theme they hammered home over and over was marked by the phrase "labor-saving devices." For a generation raised during the Great Depression, the words "labor-saving" were a powerful encouragement to buy washing machines, electric toasters, vacuum cleaners, sewing machines and the like.

We've carried that ethos into the twenty-first century. Saving labor is an accepted part of our life. We don't even question it anymore. We wouldn't think of having a television without a remote control. Some of us don't even bother with televisions. We just watch what we want on our phones or tablets.

We crave speed and equate it with efficiency. How many megabaud per second can we get out of our internet connection? We certainly don't want to wait for a web page to load or wait for an app to function.

We want what we want and we want it now. We live in a culture that demands immediate gratification. We want the fastest, most efficient way to do everything we do. Ockham's razor has invaded just about every aspect of our lives.

It's the wisdom of man run amuck.

God says, a thousand years are as a day and a day is as a thousand years. God takes millions of years to create a canyon we call grand. God settles down with things like time and pressure to create fossil fuels that we will consume in a few generations. God dawdles around and takes billions of years to create the home we call Earth.

I think God both respects and scoffs at Ockham's razor.

The mind of Christ flows from the mystery of God. A mystery that transcends time itself – at least any concept of time that we can get our minds around. A mystery that transcends our ability to capture it in language. We can only capture in language a mere shadow of the mystery that is our Creator. And the mystery of God even transcends our own experience. Our experience of our Creator is less than a tiny drop compared to all of the Earth's oceans.

Shall we despair of ever comprehending the mystery that is God, that is the mind of Christ?

No. While we will never comprehend the depth and breadth of the mystery of God, we can grasp slivers of God's light. But seeing those slivers of light requires humility. Something that humans carry in short supply, especially highly-educated and highly-affirmed humans. And I include myself in that group.

Intellectual and emotional and spiritual humility..... require patience, for sure.

Eugene Peterson translates part of today's words from Paul this way:

“God’s wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. You don’t find it lying around on the surface. It’s not the latest message, but more like the oldest—what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene.” (1 Cor. 2:10-11 MSG)

Seeking the mind of Christ is a setting aside of our assumptions about how the world works, about how people work, and I believe it’s specifically about questioning our assumptions about what we call “human nature.”

If God is in the business of transforming the world, of transforming people, then adopting the “mind of Christ” means hopefully setting aside those same assumptions and watching God at work. And it may be that God specifically uses our setting aside of our assumptions to do the work God wants to do. Maybe it’s our openness to God instilling in *us* the mind of Christ that God will use to instill the mind of Christ in others?

God’s ways are not our ways, but as we seek the mind of Christ, our ways become more and more like the ways of Jesus. Seeking the mind of Christ invites the mystery of Christ to come and live within us, to fill us, to guide us, to redeem us. Day by day by day.

Jesus himself talked about intellectual humility. Hear these words from the Mark’s Gospel:

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

Could it be that our most important preacher this morning has been Elias Hinojosa? We’ve had in our very midst this morning an example of what Jesus has described to us. Elias is still a blank slate, waiting for Jesus to write his story upon his life. May we all in some way adopt something of Elias as we work to say the words, “I don’t know.” May Elias lead us this morning to the mind of Christ.

Thanks be to God! Amen.