

**SERMON – 4<sup>TH</sup> EPIPHANY-  
I CORINTHIANS 1:18-32 AND MICAH 6:1-8  
FEBRUARY 2, 2020  
“IMPEACHABLE OFFENSES?”**

In case you missed it, there's been some talk in the news this week about witnesses. Some folks claim you can't have a trial without them...others say there isn't enough evidence to make them necessary, much less have a trial. Like most things coming out of Washington it makes your head spin. Presidential accusers say certain of his actions require removal from office while defenders seem to be parroting the old sport's adage *"no harm no foul."* I wish to opine no further on the question of impeachment. I'd rather we ponder a hypothetical question Christians ought to ask themselves – *'if I were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict – would any witnesses testify on my behalf?'*

Before we go any farther, I want to affirm that this question is a thought provoking one but not the decisive one – we're Christian on account of what God has done for us in Jesus and our trust in that work. Still, our first reading today from Micah is the transcript of a trial – and the defense Israel put up regarding its faithfulness didn't hold up before the judge whose court is truly supreme - God. After the Exodus from Egypt and before entering the land they would inhabit, God, in a ceremony on a mountain called Gerizim said to them, *"I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses."*

Now, many centuries later, and after stating his case through Micah God says *"Israel, defend yourself"* – what evidence do you have that you lived as I asked at Shittim and you promised to at Gilgal? *"Plead your case before the mountains"* – which would have been difficult to do because on those mountains stood altars where Israel worshipped other gods – and they knew it. So, they protest – in a trial if you don't have the facts or the law on your side then I guess you plead mercy. *'We'd follow you God if you hadn't made it so hard...rivers of oil, our best livestock – gee you even want our firstborn!'*

Except it was all imagined, or at least exaggerated. Sinners tend to do that. God says live modestly, and we say *"what, I'm supposed to become a monk?"* God says live generously, and we say, *"so how am I supposed to meet my mortgage and fund the kid's college."* God says show mercy and we *"what, let people walk all over me?"* What does the Lord require – simply that we love the truth and the justice it demands but lean in the direction of mercy and do it humbly. Fast forward to our lesson from I Corinthians. Paul says this approach to things is going to seem odd – the wisdom of God he says is foolishness to many, if not most people.

Paul knows that if Corinthians lived like this – with Jesus at the center of everything, they'd win converts to the faith but also earn the skepticism and scorn of large swathes of the culture. Paul doesn't come right out and quote Jesus' Sermon on the Mount but he nods to that sermon when he tells believers in Corinth people will think your nuts if you follow a crucified rabbi who told his followers to live modestly, humbly,

---

and generously, while loving their enemies and praying for their persecutors.

In his book entitled *“Resilient Faith – How the Early Christian Third Way Changed the World”*, author Gerald Sittser wrote *“Christians could have accommodated...to gain acceptance...or isolated themselves to survive...safe and irrelevant. Instead they engaged the culture... and remained separate from the culture at the same time.”* In a nod to Paul in I Corinthians, and for that matter Jesus in Matthew 5, Professor Sittser says this approach confused Romans and angered Jews. Christians pursued “a third way” – in story, authority, community, worship, and behavior – all grounded in the wisdom of God – otherwise known as the foolishness of the cross.

So back to my earlier hypothetical question – slightly reworded - *if you a Christian were suddenly accused of not being one – would there be evidence to convict?* Last week I asked you to read six statements that I and our council propose as “core values” of our congregation. I forgive you if you didn’t bring your marked -up copy of my annual report with you this morning, even as I reiterate that covet your consideration of them. Nothing about them is dramatically new – which as you may also recall from last week, I said was true of the ministry of Jesus. He was quite new sounding, but he was speaking as had the prophets of Israel. Matthew over and over says what Jesus did and said was *“to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets.”*

These core values say essentially;

- We are God Centered - a Lutheran Christian congregation which embraces the rich biblical and liturgical practices of historic, confessional Lutheranism – above all else based on what we call a “theology of the cross” – what Paul called God’s foolishness.
- We are Disciple Oriented - committed to fulfilling the will of our Lord to teach his word, be people of prayer, pursue supportive Christian fellowship and give witness to the truth of Christ according to his Great Commission in Matthew 28.
- We are Grateful People - devoted to being generous and compassionate – *“loving kindness”* as our lesson from Micah says our Lord requires of us, showing it even if not especially to those who may hate us, as Jesus says in Matthew 5.
- We are Family Focused, believing that the first “nation” our Lord’s Great Commission sends us to is the Christian home.
- We are Creation Caring, believing that our confession of *“God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth”* obliges us particularly in this age to *“doing justice”* as Micah says to our common home – remembering, as Psalm 24 says, *“The earth is the Lords, and everything in it.”*
- We are Witness Minded - believing as Paul in I Corinthians says, that *“the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*
- We are “unashamed” of the gospel – and will say so to the world by living the Christian life with humility and conviction.

If we do these things, and those other acts of faith they may inspire, if we *“live and share the life changing message of Jesus”* – as odd to the world as that may seem, the evidence would be overwhelming and no further witnesses needed, since no case would exist for calling us anything but servants of Lord Jesus Christ – fools perhaps, but fools Jesus is particularly fond of and promises will know his blessing. AMEN