

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

Fulfillment

March 15, 2009

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.”

By

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Pastor

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Prayer: Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Back in December 2006, real estate mogul Donald Trump sued the city of Palm Beach, Florida, for \$10 million dollars. The reason? The zoning board of the city objected and fined Trump \$1250 per day because he put up an 80 foot flagpole and a 15 X 25 foot US flag in front of his club. Mr. Trump felt that he didn't need a permit to put up his 'bigger than anyone else's flagpole and flag,' and that the regulations weren't consistently enforced. The zoning board saw it differently. Zoning regulations stipulate that no flagpole could be taller than 42 feet high, and he didn't have permission from the landmarks board. So, "the Donald" sued for \$10 million (<http://www.timesoftheinternet.com/absolutely-fabulous/donald-trump-sues-palm-beach-florida-for-10-million-dollars/>, retrieved March 14, 2009).

It's interesting, isn't it? So often people, when they are embedded in the ways of the world, get fixated on acquiring the biggest, or the best, or the tallest. There is quite a competition, I understand, in building the world's tallest flagpole. In Central Asia and the Middle East, the largest flagpole is slated to stand at 532 feet in Azerbaijan, capital of Baku, seven feet taller than the current record holder in North Korea, and is a full hundred and four feet taller than the current record holder for the tallest unsupported flagpole in the world in Ashbagad in Turkmenistan (located in the former Soviet Union). Apparently, more clients are lining up just to have the coveted title of possessing the world's tallest

flagpole.

Human nature doesn't seem to have changed too much. In his glory back around 3030 years ago, King David sometimes had an urge to acquire the biggest and the best. He was after all, a man who had the most power of all the surrounding nations. He had a lust for the luxuries of life. He even had this dream of building the biggest temple for God. God, of course, told David that a big temple was not needed, only true faithfulness in the heart and a desire to follow God's ways was what was needed. David never did build the temple he desired to build—his son Solomon did.

As a result of knowing what God really wants, David wrote this song towards the end of his life. In this psalm, we don't read of the marvels of human ingenuity. Instead, we read of praise given to God for God's creative power. We read of the message that the ways of God and the laws of God are not only to be sought after, but also revered, for these provide incredible fulfillment.

Our human way of trying to acquire the best, the tallest, the biggest often can end up as traps for us. Our penchant for getting what you can, as much as you can, as fast as you can often leave us unfulfilled.

Famed author and poet Maya Angelou tells of her Aunt Tee who was a woman who worked 30 years as a maid and as a live-in housekeeper for a wealthy couple in Bel-Air, California. On Saturdays, her day off, when Aunt Tee would cook up a feast and invite some of her friends over for the evening. The chauffeur, another housekeeper, and her husband would come to eat, drink, dance, laugh and play cards. One night, during the middle of big card game called "whist," the rich couple knocked on Aunt Tee's door. They apologized for disturbing her, but then got right to the point. Every Saturday night, they heard the joy and laughter coming from their quarters, and they wanted to be part of it. They yearned for the

warmth and happiness that their 14-room house, three cars, swimming pool, and who knows how much money could never buy them.

How much is fulfilling? What does it take to be fulfilled? When will we learn to trust God to meet our needs and to be fulfilled using what God provides?

God's wisdom is the best place to find our fulfillment in life. Following in God's ways, living out God's law of love—these are so much sweeter than honey, more desired than gold. Don't settle for second best! To all of us, especially our youth... Don't think our competitive ways and our materialistic wisdom will lead to life's deepest satisfaction. They will not. Don't walk in the ways that the world advocates. Instead, settle for the foolishness of God's way and discover that even God's foolishness is wiser than our best wisdom and insight, for even with God's foolishness there is deep fulfillment. (Carol M. Simpson, "How much is enough?" September 19, 1999, *American Church in Paris Web Site*, [acparis.org](http://www.americanchurchinparis.org), retrieved, March 14, 2009 from http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/illustration_search.asp?keywords=swimming%20upstream).

Take Millard Fuller, for example. He was the founder of Habitat for Humanity International which operated on a simple idea of neighbors getting together to build homes for those too poor to afford them. He died on February 3rd but is being remembered as a visionary who was committed to providing housing for the poor and has helped more than 300,000 families move from deplorable housing into decent homes that the poor owners helped build.

Millard wasn't always like that, though. His fascinating story will someday be a book and a movie, I'm sure, because he and his wife, at around 30 years old were very wealthy. He was an attorney and a business executive working in a lucrative career. But, he was very unfulfilled within his heart. That's when he and his wife Linda decided to renounce all their wealth and eventually moved

with their idea about housing for poor people. Crazy? Yes! Foolish? You bet. Wise? Ah... Yes... Fulfilling?... Undoubtedly. And Millard Fuller lived a fulfilling life as God's servant building houses for people in need (*The Christian Century*, March 10, 2009, Vol. 126, No. 5, p. 17).

This is exactly the kind of upside-down, paradoxical message about the cross that Paul was getting at when he was explaining to those Corinthians the key living in a new, fulfilling life. The key is Christ's cross! The cross was the way to this new life, even though it was the method of capital punishment for criminals. It is crazy to think that this way of death is the way to get God and a renewed life; it is sheer foolishness! But, in the midst of all the other common ways people thought they could get to God and this new life, like looking for signs or delving into the philosophical discussions, Paul said the only one you need is the cross of Christ! The only one that reflects God's wisdom is the cross! God's love is shown so powerfully right there! See what Jesus went through to get us close to God? But that sounds too crazy and ludicrous to human sensibilities. So, the argument was rejected (as was Jesus).

It takes faith to believe in God's foolishness. But that is where fulfillment within is found. It takes willingness to live in God's ways as taught by Jesus, deep spiritual fulfillment is found here, too.

Last Friday morning on *The Today Show*, Meredith Vierra was interviewing a woman named Jennifer Thompson-Cannino and a man named Ronald Cotton. Back in 1984, Jennifer pinpointed Ronald Cotton out of a police lineup as the man who raped her. He was convicted, sentenced for life, and incarcerated. DNA testing, however, has since proved Ronald Cotton's innocence, and in 1995, Mr. Cotton was exonerated. Since his release, Ronald and Jennifer have become friends and advocates and collaborated on a book together called Picking Cotton: A Memoir of Injustice and Redemption. Two years after it was clear in Jennifer's mind that that Ron Cotton was in prison unjustly, she asked to visit him. Meredith said, "He

forgave you.” Jennifer said, “Immediately. Immediately, without hesitation.” (<http://living.aol.com/morning-rush/wrongly-imprisoned-today/2454318/BOW>, retrieved March 14, 2009). Now, what they call a natural friendship has grown between them, a fulfillment in life had also grown.

Forgiveness is one of God’s ways taught by Jesus. Does it sound crazy for Ronald Cotton to forgive Jennifer Thompson Cannino after 11 years of his life was lost in prison? Indeed!

If one follows with God’s foolish ways, it is crazy from our way of understanding life, and it is foolish for God to teach us to live this way, but we are encouraged to remember, God’s foolishness is wiser than our smartest wisdom.

Fulfillment comes with surrender to God, friends, plain and simple. Trusting God is key because God means to give us life that is rich with meaning and fulfilling beyond our deepest cravings and yearnings.

Come unto God today. We’ve been through enough that stresses us, enough that chases us down and wearies our spirit. We have for too long tried to do things our way with the idea that bigger is better. Ignore all that. Come to God’s refreshing, fulfilling grace, trust in God’s way. God is present here. God is our strength. We will find fulfillment in God and all our words will change to shouts and songs of joy. Let us stand and sing this hymn that reflects these words. Amen.