

# **FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH**

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*SCRIPTURE: John 15:19b-20*

*DATE: October 21, 2018*

*LOCATION: Auditorium (Bill)*

*SERIES: Less of Me, More of You*

*SERMON: “Fools For Christ”*

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*(Acknowledgment to “Anonymous”, author of the book Embracing Obscurity.)*

Have you ever had anyone say to you, **“I just don’t get you.”**

If so, you know what they’re really saying is, *“I don’t understand you...I don’t understand why you do some of the things you do.”*

The words “I don’t get you?” are probably words that every follower of Jesus should expect to hear at times throughout life. If Jesus is walking in this direction...and those who don’t follow Him are walking in that direction...what direction should we be going? With Jesus, right? And so there should be times when a lot of people just don’t get – just don’t understand - some of the things we do.

The apostle Paul, in one of his letters to the church in Corinth wrote that **“We are fools for Christ!” (I Cor.4:10a)** He and others like him were going through some pretty trying times, but they didn’t care what others said or thought about them.

This morning’s message is titled **“Fools for Christ.”** ...and when I’m talking “fool”, I’m not talking about being unintelligent or uninformed. Someone who is a fool for Christ is going to be thoughtful and always learning.

Randy Alcorn once wrote, **“The question is not whether we will be seen as fools – that part is certain – but when and by whom will we be seen as fools. Better to be seen as**

***fools now in the eyes of other people – including other Christians – than to be seen as fools forever in the eyes of the Audience of One, whose judgment ultimately matters.”***

Our sermon series is titled **Less of Me, More of You**...making less of ourselves in order to make much of God. And simply embracing this kind of attitude - not joining in when it comes to all the self-promotion...taking advantage of opportunities to make much of Jesus – this type of attitude can cause other people to look at you and say, “You know...I just don’t get you.”

Let’s begin by looking at...

## **1. The Example of Jesus**

People didn’t seem to “get” Jesus. This appears to be somewhat intentional on His part. He spoke in parables that often would come across as somewhat mysterious.

But it wasn’t just that, there were other things about His life and ministry that people didn’t get. The religious leaders were not looking for a Messiah that looked or acted like Jesus. How He would embrace and eat with sinners...healing on the Sabbath...thinking that He somehow had the authority to forgive sin.

And it wasn’t just the religious leaders...there was a lot that the disciples didn’t “get” when it came to Jesus.

For instance I’m sure they were convinced that some sort of uprising against the Romans was inevitable. Peter was still itching for a fight up until the time that Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The High Priest and other religious leaders and the Roman soldiers appear in the Garden to arrest Jesus and put Him to death. Peter pulls out his sword and cuts the ear off of the servant of the High Priest. Imagine Peter’s reaction when Jesus tells him to put away his sword...and watches as Jesus heals the ear of the servant. Don’t you think Peter was thinking, *“I just don’t get it. I just don’t understand.”*

All of this begs the question: If we are followers of Jesus - If we are walking with Jesus and the world didn't get Him – then why would we expect those who aren't following Jesus to “get” us either?

To the point of this series, *“What would cause a follower of Jesus to go along with a culture that seems dead set on self-promotion?”*

A few hours before those events transpired in Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples...

**John 15:19b-20 ...you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you (doesn't get you). Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”**

*“If they don't get me, if they don't understand me and who I am and what I am about...they won't get you either. They won't understand why you do some of the things you do.”*

Including the fact that we are committed to making less of ourselves in order to make more of Jesus.

This would be a good time for me to share with you...

## **2. The Story of Rose Mapendo**

Born in 1963 in the Congo – over in Africa – she was **a part of the Tutsi tribe that embraced and professed Christianity**. In 1998, the Democratic Republic of the Congo ordered the genocide of those belonging to the Tutsi tribe.

Rose – who was now pregnant – was taken along with her husband, children and 4 other Tutsi families to a death camp where her husband and the other men was tortured and eventually executed. Two other women and two other children were also executed during their 16 months there...under unbearable conditions. The children had to defecate in the cell because there was no sanitation.

Rose wrestled mightily with her faith in God at this time. *Why did He make her Tutsi? Why did He make her a woman? Why did He allow her to become pregnant right before this nightmare?* She grew to hate the 4 men who guarded the cell now shared with 30 other women and children.

But it was also during this time that Rose came to peace with God and His sovereignty and chose to forgive the 4 men who guarded and mistreated her and the others.

The time came for Rose to deliver, and on the cold, hard floor of the cell, she gave birth to twins, cutting the umbilical cords with a piece of wood. And then, in an act that many in the world simply would not get... she named her children after two of the guards. She wanted them to know she was not their enemy.

And they seemed to realize this. Not long after the twins were born, the wife of the camp commander came with some clothing and food. They were transferred to another camp, two weeks later to another...10 days later she was brought into an emergency program established by the United States government to resettle Tutsi refugees from the Congo.

In 2000 she received refugee status and moved to the United States. Since then she has worked to raise awareness about problems faced by refugees. She now lives in Arizona and the twins born in the death camp graduated from high school in the spring of last year.

Naming those twins after the guards would have made absolutely no sense to those around them. But this was a “Less of me, more of You” moment for Rose. Rather than hatred, she exhibited incredible humility and by doing so, points us to a humble Christ.

### **3. How About Us?**

Are there some who see some of the decisions we make – to choose to embrace obscurity for instance – and look at us and say, “You know, I just don’t get it.”

Let me suggest 3 specific areas where Jesus might be calling us to live in a way that makes us look like fools to others, but to Jesus...makes us look like a fool for Him.

First...

### **A. Embracing True Success**

How do most people define success?

If you are in a position to go online or walk into a store and buy whatever your eyes see and your heart desires, wouldn't most people consider you financially successful? Perhaps this is why people are willing to take on significant debt...in an effort to at least look successful to the world around them.

If you know what it is to be one of the best at what you do- whatever field you are in - then there is a certain degree of recognition and status that comes along with that...and I think that most people would consider you a success.

But here's what God wants us to know.

**1 John 2:16 ...everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.**

There is nothing wrong with wanting to feel good...it is okay to have accumulated certain things and achieved certain things in life. But it is so easy to stop walking in His direction and start walking in the other way.

It's very challenging for us to avoid pursuing some pleasures that are sinful and harmful to us. It's challenging to avoid excess in many of the "good" things we do. It is hard for us not to want to show off our things – make much of ourselves - in order to get affirmation from others.

A.W. Tozier wrote this about our desire to possess and accumulate "Things":

***“There is within the human heart a tough, fibrous root of the fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets things with a deep and fierce passion. The words “my” and “mine” look innocent enough in print, but their constant use is significant. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended. God’s gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by this monstrous substitution.”***

How do we view our things? Are we making too much of them and too little of God?

Again, it’s not wrong to have things or accomplish things. Just know that it is not what you have or what you have achieved that defines your value.

And so the question becomes, how does God Himself measure of true success?

If you are familiar with the story of Job, you know there was a point in his life where he had it all. He had accumulated and accomplished much. But God was not impressed with Job’s success nor did He frown upon Job’s success. He simply had this to say about Job:

**Job 1:8 “There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”**

Job wasn’t successful in God’s eyes because of his wealth or his accomplishments. And so Job’s story gives us a glimpse into God’s take on success...what it is and what it isn’t.

For one, it’s shunning – rejecting - evil. Job gets affirmation from God Himself for doing this. The Bible calls it righteousness...right living...living right.

And so let me give you what I think is a good suggestion that will help us get our thinking straight. This week I’d like to challenge you to read and reread the beginning of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. This is where Jesus clearly lays out the way to find true success when He says...

**“Blessed are the humble...blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (*shunning evil, living right*)...Blessed are the merciful...blessed are the pure in heart...Blessed are those who work for peace...Blessed are those who are persecuted for doing right. (*Blessed are you if people say “I don’t get you” for doing the right thing*).**

**You are blessed when people mock you and persecute you and say evil things against you because you are my followers. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” (Matthew 5)**

Think about how differently the world defines success – the things we can hold in our hands – and what God calls success: Things you can never hold in your hand...humility, mercy, righteousness, peace.

Might this be an area where Jesus is calling you – calling me - to live in a way that might make us look like fools to others...but to Jesus...makes us look like a fool for Him?

Here’s a second area...

## **B. Embracing Servanthood**

Oswald Chambers wrote some pretty hard words when he put this down...

***“It is one thing to follow God’s way of service if you are regarded as a hero, but quite another if the road marked out for you by God requires being a doormat under other people’s feet. Are you willing to give and be poured out until you are all used up and exhausted – not seeking to be ministered to, but to minister?”***

Hard, hard words. So hard, that the only way that we could ever possibly hope to accept them and commit to them is by embracing Jesus as we never have before. Perhaps to an extent that we never thought possible.

Serving others is a lot easier when people are aware of it and when we are regarded as heroes for doing it.

Bernard of Clairvaux was a monk who lived in the 1100's...he once uttered these profound words: ***“Learn the lesson that, if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a scepter but a hoe.”***

In other words, if we are going to do the work of Jesus and serve others like Jesus, don't expect to be regarded as a hero. Don't expect to be treated like royalty. Don't be looking for others to be looking. Go about your acts of service, humbly and quietly. It may not win us the admiration of others, but it's not the admiration of others that we should be seeking.

You see, God has given us both a command *and* a promise:

**1 Peter 5:5b All of you, serve each other with humility, for “God opposes the proud but favors the humble.”**

What was that phrase we looked at last week? **Humility comes before honor**, right? This reminds me of a little parable that is tucked away in the book of Judges...the parable of the trees.

**Judges 9:8-13 One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, ‘Be our king.’ But the tree answered, “Should I give up my oil, by which both God and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees?”**

**Next, the trees said to the fig tree, ‘Come and be our king.’ But the fig tree replied, ‘Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?’**

**Then the trees said to the grapevine, ‘Come and be our king.’ But the vine answered, ‘Should I give up my wine, which cheers both God and men, to hold sway over the trees?’**

The parable concludes with the trees – desperate for a king to rule over them - settling for a thorn bush. But what I don't want you to miss is the attitude, the priorities of the first three candidates for the throne: the olive tree, the fig tree and the grape vine.

All three turn down a position of power, of influence, of recognition...in favor of being true what they believed their purpose should be: To quietly serve both God and men.

The olive tree, fig tree and vine all chose to remain less instead of becoming more because they understood and accepted their true calling.

Now, it's possible that as a follower of Jesus you'll be called to a position of prominence. Don't think I'm saying that as followers of Jesus we must pass over or reject a position of prominence or influence. Far from it.

In fact, next week we'll talk about what we're called to do when we *do* find ourselves in the spotlight. Sometimes being seen simply cannot be avoided. But it should never, ever be what motivates us. And so if our calling is to "hidden service", can we humbly embrace this and feel satisfied that Jesus sees and knows.

Might *this* area of hidden service be where Jesus is calling us to live in a way that might make us look like fools to others...but to Jesus...makes us look like a fool for Him?

The third and final area is...

### **C. Embracing Suffering**

When we think of suffering we often think about those who have experienced the death of a loved one or are in the midst of a terminal illness. And I think, "Who am I to weigh in on something like this when there are many in this world and many in this room who could speak on the topic of suffering with much more experience than I.

And while I do not want in any way to lessen the pain and suffering felt by those who have personal experience with such things, I also want to defer to Elizabeth Elliot, who has first-hand experience with tragedy. If you're not aware, her husband Jim was speared to death along with four other men while serving as missionaries in Ecuador. In spite of her own experience with suffering...Elliot points out that no one is truly exempt from some degree of suffering.

Her definition of suffering is simply this: ***“Having what you don’t want...or wanting what you don’t have.”***

With that in mind, I want to talk about how we sometimes view suffering in the wrong way. This trend that we see from time to time goes by the name of “The Joseph Principle” and it goes something like this:

“If I am suffering today, God must be preparing me for something greater and better later in life.”

It’s called the Joseph principle because this faulty thinking is rooted in a misunderstanding of Joseph’s story found in the book of Genesis. Joseph is betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused and thrown into prison. And yet what do we know to be true? God used all of Joseph’s suffering to prepare him for greatness. Incredibly, Joseph becomes second in command in all of Egypt and ends up saving his brothers and his entire family. In the end, Joseph is famous and powerful.

His isn’t the only story like that. Moses had to spend 40 years toiling as a shepherd before becoming powerful and famous throughout Egypt. Hannah put up with taunts and disappointment before God gave her Samuel. David endured 14 years of dodging Saul, spending years in the wilderness before becoming the greatest king that Israel ever had.

These stories resonate with us because there is something about enduring and being rewarded in the end that gives us hope. If you’ve ever been fired or broken up with, you have probably heard these well-meaning words of encouragement: “Don’t worry, God has something better in store for you!”

It’s possible that not only have we heard these words, but have said them – or something like them – ourselves. And I’ll bet one reason we do is because we really hope that things do get better for the one who is suffering. And people will see it and God will be glorified.

But here's the flip-side and one we never really say out loud, because the last thing we want to do is kick someone when they're down. But the hard truth is this: Sometimes suffering does not bring on something better...at least not anything that other people see.

For all the examples of Joseph, Moses, Hannah and David, there are also examples of God allowing suffering for the sole purpose of refining our hearts and getting us to let go of our things in our lives that we place above Him.

We like to think that our suffering really will lead to something better, something other than just to bring glory to God. Romans 8:28 is the verse most often used in support of The Joseph Principle...

**Romans 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

And this is absolutely true. But if we think that the word “good” means something similar to how the world defines success, we couldn't be more wrong.

Yes, God works all things for our good, even our suffering. But the end result may look different than we hope.

And the question becomes, are you – am I – still willing to trust God if our “good” is simply to keep on becoming less so that He can become more? What if your “good” and my “good” is to experience the deepest depths of suffering so that we have more to give to others who are walking a similar path? What if our “good” was simply a greater understanding of the suffering Jesus went through on our behalf? What if the sole purpose for our “good”...for our suffering is simply to make His name great?

I know this is not easy, but when we accept our suffering as an opportunity to have more to give than get...this is where humility is born. And this kind of humility – the kind that Jesus modeled for us – is the beginning of **“Less of me, more of You.”**

And so quickly, just to review our application for this week: **Overcoming sin must take priority over promoting ourselves.** If we there is an area in our life where we are not – like Job - shunning evil, then before we invest any time and effort into drawing attention to ourselves, we invest time and energy into drawing closer to and depending on Jesus to overcome this area of brokenness.

**Read and reread the first part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount...the Beatitudes.**

**Look for an opportunity to sacrificially serve someone else...and don't tell anyone about it.**

Finally, **look at your suffering in a new way.** Not with the expectation that it will lead to something bigger and better, though it might. Just know that what you are experiencing might be to put you in the position to quietly help someone else...or simply to better understand the suffering of Christ on your behalf.

As always, this week, **let's make less of ourselves, and much of God.**