

Divine Folly

Gene McAfee
Faith United Church of Christ
Richmond Heights, Ohio
The Third Sunday in Lent
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Lessons (<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=73>)

Exodus 20:1-17
1 Corinthians 1:18-25
John 2:13-22

Text: "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." -- 1 Corinthians 1:25

It will surprise none of you, I hope, to hear that I was never a Girl Scout, but I was, for a number of years, a Boy Scout, and one of the things I had to do for my cooking merit badge was fry a hamburger patty on a rock.

For that particular part of the badge, I was dropped off at a campsite by my scoutmaster, given a quarter of a pound of ground beef, a bun, two carrots and two ribs of celery, my canteen of water, two matches, and my scout knife, and told to make myself lunch within two hours. And I learned that if you find a rock thin enough and get it hot enough and wait long enough you can have a fried hamburger lunch with carrot and celery sticks.

That was forty years ago and those were the Boy Scouts. Today we mark the one hundredth anniversary of the Girl Scouts, founded, as you can see from the flier in this morning's bulletin, on March 12, 1912, by Juliette "Daisy" Low in Savannah, Georgia.

A new biography reveals that Daisy Low founded this organization to build girls, as their mission statement says, "of courage, confidence, and character," partly in response to her own personal misfortunes and heartbreaks.

Although both born and married to wealth, Daisy Low began to grow deaf early in her adulthood, and the man she married, wealthy Englishman Willy Low, was an alcoholic philanderer, and their marriage was not happy.

In the Gilded Age from roughly the 1880s to the start of the First World War, the disparity between the wealthy and the rest grew wider than at any time except the present, and Daisy Low believed that all girls, regardless of means, should be given the opportunity "to develop physically, mentally, and spiritually" as our flier says.

Many people agreed with her, and over 50 million women in the United States today are alumnae of the Girl Scouts, including those who are sitting together this morning here at Faith as well as others from our congregation who are absent, including Betty St. John, one of the charter members of this congregation.

The text for this morning's sermon is from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, in which he says that "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

Is it foolishness, this occasion forces me to ask myself, to insist that an adolescent boy fry a hamburger on a rock? Or does he thereby learn resourcefulness, patience, and a sense of accomplishment? Is it foolishness to attempt to develop those traits in a child?

Is it foolishness to provide the opportunity for girls of all ages, races, backgrounds, and means to leave the isolating and hopeless homes in which they often live to experience nature, sports, camaraderie, civic engagement, and service to others?

Is it foolishness for harried adults to give up precious free time and energy to volunteer to make such opportunities possible? Is it foolishness to give time, treasure, and talent in the effort to make one girl or one boy feel safer in the world, more at home with God's creation, and part of a community that celebrates human worth and diversity? Is it foolishness thus to expend ourselves?

It is said that planting a tree is an act of faith, and I believe that's true. But an even greater act of faith is to invest in the human capital that we call the future, not just for a privileged few, and not just for the people only, but rather for the entire planet. The conditions for happiness and misery, for individuals and for masses, are the result of choices we make, and if we commit ourselves, as the Girl Scouts and so many others have, to the welfare of the world, that God so dearly loves, we become partners in that divine folly that says the path to peace is peace, that one person, like "Crazy Daisy" Low, can make a difference, and that when we care for the least powerful and the most vulnerable, we welcome the holy into our midst.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, said that "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." None of us can every know the secret power of grace, which is hidden in the depths of the mystery of God. And because we cannot ever fully know the working of God's grace, we cannot know the ultimate effects of bringing a child to literacy and security, of introducing a child to the beauty and bounty of a garden, or of making s'mores.

We live in faith and are saved by grace, and to the perishing, so much of it, especially the cross, seems foolishness. But not to us. And not to God.