

Braggadocio

Micah 6:1-8
I Corinthians 1:18-31

Did you see this in Friday's Tribune-Star? Columnist Mark Bennett wrote of the blizzard of 1978, which somehow happened 45 years ago this week. He said everybody who lived through it can remember where they were when it hit. I was stuck at my dorm at IU. Though my family lived less than twenty miles away once the first 24 hours passed nobody could get through on roads blocked by more snow than we could have imagined falling in southern Indiana. Trouble was, IU heated the entire campus from one coal-fired plant. They stored the coal outside, on the ground. But the blizzard covered those massive piles of coal, and they stopped heating the buildings. So I walked through the drifts to a friend's house about a quarter mile away. I was young and foolish; I remember actually enjoying the spectacle, the buried vehicles, the horizontal, screaming snow. (I could enjoy that because I was walking east—the same direction the wind propelled the snow.)

Mark Bennett related the story of a Terre Haute man who tried to beat the storm by driving to his brother's home in Crawfordsville. He got stuck on a rural road for hours. I quote from Bennett's story: "He penned an 'I love you' message to his family and put it on the dashboard. After five hours in his car, he started walking for help, figuring that was his only chance. He carried the note in his pocket and trudged a half

mile through blinding snow, before reaching a house, where he was welcomed. 'It felt like a million miles,' he told a Tribune reporter on the 1978 weekend. 'I was walking through snow drifts that were waist-high. I fell down a couple of times, but I had to keep going...I just thank the Lord I am alive.'"

Writing to a confused and conflict-ridden congregation, the Apostle Paul told those Christians to stop relying on their own powers, and to start turning for "the source of your life in Christ Jesus." At best we humans are foolish and weak. Sometimes it takes a storm to get us to admit the truth of this. It might have taken me ten minutes to get from my dorm to Geoff Clark's family's house. I wore my inadequate winter coat over my daily uniform of that time, a t-shirt and jeans, with tennis shoes on my feet and my gloveless hands jammed into my pockets. Thank God his mom was home when I got there. It really was a foolish thing to do. We cannot call that Terre Haute man foolish to get out of his car. We were not there. We did not hear the howling wind. We did not have to watch the gas gauge slowly drop as he ran the engine to stay warm. Ish. But by the time he found shelter he had developed a respect for the power of creation and gratitude to its maker for his deliverance. We are temporary, small, entirely reliant on God. This is why Paul could conclude, "Let those who boast, boast of the Lord.

These verses appear near the start of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. They contain one of the primary reasons for him to write: to correct the tendency some in that church had of trying to control things with the "superiority" of their own ideas.

He started with a quote from Isaiah, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart." In the Book of Isaiah we find these words are addressed to hypocritical leaders of the Hebrews, men who pretend to worship Yahweh but who instead use their positions to enrich and empower themselves. Here in Corinthians Paul uses the passage to hammer home his point that the spread of the Gospel does not depend on human powers. "Where is the wise man?" he asks with clear disdain. He means there *is* no wise man. Nor are there scribes or debaters who can advance the Gospel.

No, the "folly of what we preach" saves those who believe. We Presbyterians have always emphasized the importance of an "educated clergy". We have created a preparation process for the ministry that requires a minimum of a bachelor's plus a master's degree. In order to get ordained our preachers must pass four standard examinations, which at least back in the day required four full days of writing in blue books, getting cramped hands and praying what we wrote was not folly. I still have the