

**Sunday, August 20, 2017**

Dr. Seuss Book: The Zax

Sermon Title: Stubborn Pride

Scripture: Proverbs 12:15

Basic Idea:

*Proverbs 12:15*

*<sup>15</sup>Fools think their own way is right,  
but the wise listen to advice.*

Neither one will budge an inch. Stubborn pride will not allow one to yield to the other. They are in a standoff with no way out. A good word to describe them is obstinate. But if you need more words to describe them how about: unyielding, inflexible, unbending, mulish, bullheaded, pig-headed, strong-willed, headstrong, stiff-necked, rigid, uncompromising, or immovable. It is so easy to see that the North-going Zax and South-going Zax are just fools. Oblivious to the world around them, they don't seem to care about anyone but themselves. Each are so fixated on getting their own way that it doesn't matter if they stand there refusing to budge for 59 years.

I can imagine Dr. Phil trying to intervene. "So, how's that working for you?" he asks. But the Zax are incapable of seeing how their standoff is not just foolish, it is detrimental to them both. They are consumed with the conflict; unwilling and unable to see a way out. It is as ridiculous as it appears...

So, what is the difference between obstinacy and determination? What's the difference between stubbornness and perseverance? What about the spiritual that says, "I shall not be, I shall not be moved," and its civil rights sister "We shall not be moved?" At General Assembly, Rev. Dr. William Barber, the Disciples preacher that some say is picking up Martin Luther King, Jr.'s mantle, said repeatedly, "Stand your ground and don't bow down." What's the difference between a fool and prophet?

The answer is actually pretty simple. A fool is stubborn for all the wrong reasons...like protecting one's ego or fearing change. A fool is self-centered and refuses counsel. Fools believe their opinion is the only one that matters. Fools have a hard time with facts. The Book of Proverbs has lots to say about these kinds of fools:

[Proverbs 1:7](#)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; **fools** despise wisdom and instruction.

[Proverbs 12:16](#)

**Fools** show their anger at once, but the prudent ignore an insult.

[Proverbs 12:23](#)

One who is clever conceals knowledge, but the mind of a **fool** broadcasts folly.

[Proverbs 14:1](#)

The wise woman builds her house, but the **foolish** tears it down with her own hands.

[Proverbs 14:16](#)

The wise are cautious and turn away from evil, but the **fool** throws off restraint and is careless.

[Proverbs 17:10](#)

A rebuke strikes deeper into a discerning person than a hundred blows into a **fool**.

[Proverbs 17:12](#)

Better to meet a she-bear robbed of its cubs than to confront a **fool** immersed in folly.

[Proverbs 18:2](#)

A **fool** takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.

[Proverbs 18:7](#)

The mouths of **fools** are their ruin, and their lips a snare to themselves.

[Proverbs 20:3](#)

It is honorable to refrain from strife, but every **fool** is quick to quarrel.

[Proverbs 29:11](#)

A **fool** gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back.

These proverbs are so obvious – and yet the people who need to hear them the most are the ones least able to hear them.

Now I have not done it intentionally, I have known preachers, who, on occasion, will preach a sermon in hopes that it falls gently on the ears of one particular person. Never does that person shake the preachers hand and say, “That’s just what I needed to hear today.” Nope, that person is more inclined to say, “It’s too bad so and so wasn’t here to hear that sermon today.”

Lest we become fools I think it is good to have a little refresher on how not to be a fool.

1. Listen more than you talk
2. Don’t make assumptions – check the facts
3. Be open to instruction
4. Be willing to admit you’re are wrong.
5. Seek out wise counsel
6. Learn to collaborate
7. Think before you speak, post, and hit “send”
8. Be willing to ask for forgiveness and forgive
9. Seek to do what is best for all God’s children, not just some
10. Identify problems such as injustice without demonizing people
11. Do not promote or perpetuate violence
12. Pray. Be compassionate. Ask yourself what would Jesus do?

This is third grade Sunday School...and yet we struggle with it...at least I struggle with it.

The Zax refuse to budge because of foolish, stubborn pride. Let’s not confuse this kind of foolish posturing with the determination it takes to stand up to injustice and hatred. If we are going to be unmoved and stand our ground, let it be for the cause of our neighbor and not our own egos. If we are going to be mulish and pig-headed, let it be for love and peacemaking and not our own self-

interest. If we are going to be unyielding and inflexible, let it be in our commitment to non-violence. If we are going to be strong-willed and uncompromising, let it be in our refusal to dehumanize and demonize our neighbor. If we are going to be stubborn and persistent, let it be in our desire to follow Jesus.

There is a time to stand your ground – being inconvenienced by a few inches isn't one of those times.

I am so glad Dr. Seuss gives us such a hopeful ending. We don't have to wait on fools – we can work around them. Maybe they will come around, maybe not.

We don't have to wait on fools to build God's kingdom...and we don't have to act like fools as we build it.

With modern technology we can monitor our heart and sleep, take our own blood pressure, analyze our dna...it's too bad no one has invented a foolometer. It would be so much easier if a machine told me I was acting like fool. But alas, there is no such machine – just a community of imperfect people trying to inspire each other's better nature. It is important work.

Martin Luther King Jr said, “We must learn to live together as brothers or **perish** together as **fools**.”

It really is a choice.

Amen.