

Foolishness
1 Corinthians 1:18-31

What do we need to do to get more people to come to our church? Jazz things up a bit, put on a good show so that people are entertained? Have sermons that make people feel good about themselves instead of talking about sin so much? How about teaching people that God wants them to be healthy and wealthy, and that if their faith is just strong enough, God will give them these things?

All of these are being done by church leaders who may have forgotten that it is not their church, but Christ's, and that it is His Holy Spirit who creates and sustains faith where and when He pleased through the foolishness of the cross.

To preach Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins is foolishness to a world that is perishing. But it is in the preaching of Christ crucified that we find God's wisdom, strength, and salvation. *[To us who are being saved it is the power of God.]*

The Corinthians lived in a different time, but their world and ours are very much the same.

The Corinthians were preoccupied with making a living, following current trends, and looking to politicians to solve their problems.

They followed whatever god they thought would give them what they wanted.

And they treated sporting events like a religion!

To the Jews of the time, including those in Corinth, the message of the cross was a "stumbling block". It made no sense at all that God's chosen one would end his life nailed to a cross (Deuteronomy 21:23). Despite Isaiah 53 and other prophecies, they had lost sight of a suffering Messiah.

Our society continues to try to avoid suffering. It's a bad thing, right? Surely God wants to bless us with good things. If we are suffering, it must mean God is mad at us for something.

The Jews also looked for signs and miracles as proof. Many looked for a Davidic Messiah to conquer the Romans and restore their land. They remembered the miracles of the Red Sea crossing, the manna from heaven, the destruction of the walls of Jericho. Surely the Messiah would do something like these.

Even today, people want signs and miracles from God: An immediate answer to a prayer for healing, the gift of speaking in tongues, or the thought that "I have to feel something deep down inside me; it can't be as simple as trusting God to work through His word to do what it says it will do."

To the Greeks of the first century the message of the cross was "foolishness".

The Greeks believed that the body was evil, that only the spirit had value. They saw the very idea of incarnation, of God becoming man, as revolting, an insult to the gods, and impossible. Their gods often meddled in human affairs, but for their own selfish agendas.

Many people today believe in an impersonal God, one who is not interested in the affairs of humanity. Why believe in a god who doesn't really care about you?

The Greeks sought wisdom. They were obsessed with eloquent words and philosophical arguments. For them, the blunt message of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sin and the only means of salvation was very narrow minded and uncultured.

Sounds familiar. Today the preaching of the cross is regarded as foolish. Christians are seen as uninformed – people who believe in fairy tales.

What we believe is written down for us, but it is not a fairy tale. It is a tale of a God who loves us and established a plan of salvation that included the very real suffering and death of His beloved Son.

Every year during Lent we focus on the foolishness of the cross – the suffering and death of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We walk the difficult steps to Gethsemane. We climb to Golgotha and contemplate the hours of torment on the cross. We follow the events of Holy Week in the liturgy and hymns that we have heard and sung since we were children.

We know what will happen. We hear the familiar shouts of “Crucify him! Crucify him!” rise from the crowd. We are drawn into the events of Jesus passion year after year. Why?

Why do we come to hear this “foolishness”?

Because even though *the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, ... to us who are being saved it is the*

power of God... For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The world will see us Christians as foolish and weak. But we don't live in our own wisdom or our own strength; we live in Christ's. St. Paul reminds the Church then and now that Jesus says, *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.* Therefore, Paul can say, *For when I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Christ did strengthen Paul to preach the cross with power, as did all the apostles. They preached the cross with power because it was (and is) the power of God – the power of God to save you from your sin.

There is nothing impersonal about God's love for you. He wants you to be His very own and live with Him forever. And so, He has made you His beloved child in the water and word of baptism. The water and word accomplished His purpose without any help from you, because that is His promise.

The Lord continues to reach out to you through His word as you read it, and hear it read and proclaimed from the lectern, pulpit, and in the promise of absolution.

God gives us the sign of His Son's supper. In this simple but miraculous sacrament Jesus comes to you with His body and blood in the bread and wine to deliver to you the forgiveness of sins He earned for you on His cross.

To many people this sounds like foolishness. But in you, the Holy Spirit has created faith to believe that Jesus loves you, for you He went to the cross, and through this foolishness you are saved. Amen.