

*1 Corinthians 1:18-31* <sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." <sup>20</sup> Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. <sup>26</sup> For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. <sup>27</sup> But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; <sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, <sup>29</sup> that no flesh should glory in His presence. <sup>30</sup> But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -- <sup>31</sup> that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

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If I handed out a survey today with one question, what would be your answer to this question, "Do you want to be wise or foolish?" I would suppose that it wouldn't take long for you to answer the question. Most of us right away would answer wise. Many people are fools, but no one seeks such a role in life.

Paul is writing in our Gospel lesson for the day to the Corinthians. In order to truly understand our text for the day we must first understand what Corinth was like at this time. An ancient historian named Dio Chrysostom explained what life in Corinth was like. It was a city full of wise men, called sophists. These wise men would come into a town and try to impress people with their elegant and wise words. They would stand outside the pagan temples and shout at and revile one another. Each man had to prove that his own wisdom was truly wise by arguing for it. So each man gathered his own disciples and they argued and fought with one another. Dio described these men as gorgeous peacocks lifted aloft on the wings of their fame and their disciples. It might well be likened to a presidential campaign of nowadays. Various men competing with various ideas who are not afraid to use whatever they need to get their point across to receive popular support.

Into this setting of wise men came Paul. Paul came with an unimpressive presence and apparently even less impressive skills at public speaking. The people of Corinth said of Paul that he could write a wonderful letter, but when he came you certainly weren't spellbound by his presentations. Paul came into a city that valued above all else wisdom and eloquent speaking and he had neither.

Rather Paul had a message. He had a message that was no doubt foolish to all who heard it. His message was this: “that God had accepted death in the form of a crucified Jewish carpenter from Galilee in order to break the power of death and bring salvation to all men.” What foolishness those wise men of Corinth thought! Power through death and salvation accomplished through weakness, it surely couldn’t be. Paul and his message were pure foolishness to the wise men of his age.

It is often fascinating when you read history to ponder how historians will describe our day in years to come? Perhaps they will describe it this way. The wise men of their day debated in books and on television and gathered their disciples who fought with one another. We too have our gorgeous peacocks that are lifted high by their fame and their disciples who follow them. Oprah spreads her word of self-realized fulfillment. Dr. Phil asserts that the key to the world is simply common sense and tough love. Jonathan Edwards assures us that peace will come through crossing over to talk with those spirits that have already passed away. Television hosts each have their own wisdom. Authors each craft their own thoughtful words. Each one, with well-produced television shows and carefully edited books, present their wisdom to the world. And as their words go out, their disciples are formed and their messages debated.

And into this world we step with a foolish message. What is that message? “that God had accepted death in the form of a crucified Jewish carpenter from Galilee in order to break the power of death and bring salvation to all men.” Yes, the same message that Paul took with him to Corinth we take to our world. We preach Christ crucified, we preach a Messiah who was killed as our hope. Is it foolish to our world? Sure it is. But we who believe know that it is not foolishness but the wisdom of God. We know that the Carpenter who died was Jesus, God himself, and that through His death we have life. We know that the foolishness of the cross is for us the power of salvation.

And so this is what we preach time and time again, Jesus and Him crucified. Oh to be sure, we could draw more people to our church if we promised a miracle to every visitor. We could ever draw more people to our church by inviting famous people of any belief to come and share their wisdom with us. For the Jews sought signs and the Gentiles sought wisdom and the people of our day and age will flock to either. But we do not seek to draw people by miracle or fame, but rather by our crucified Lord. We will simply proclaim Jesus

here and trust the Holy Spirit to draw people to Him. For we know that foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. Yes, our world might find the idea of a Crucified Man as our Savior a little odd. They may not understand why we follow one who seemingly couldn't even save Himself. They may not even want to look upon a bloodied Jesus. But it is Him who we know and Him who we preach.

Indeed, it is this very message of Jesus and Him crucified that the Holy Spirit uses to create faith. It is the message of foolishness that brings true Godly wisdom. It is God's foolishness that brings power. God loves to use what the world sees as weakness and foolishness to confound the wise and strong. We can see this even in our place in God's kingdom.

We too like the Corinthians know that none of us here gathered are here because of our accomplishments. We were all weak with sin and yet God has given us power beyond belief. He has forgiven us weak sinners and made us into strong saints. We know that if we have anything to brag about, it is simply what God had done for us and in us because of His grace. If we glory, we glory in the Lord. We are in Christ not because we were worthy recipients of such a blessing, but rather because a more than worthy Christ welcomed us into His kingdom.

God makes a habit out of uses the weak things of the world to deliver His powerful gifts. Last week, he used water to bring Olivia into His glorious kingdom. In two weeks, He will use bread and wine to keep us in that kingdom. Oh the world might think us rather foolish to believe that water, bread, and wine can do anything, but we trust that God's foolishness is our peace. His ways are our comfort, and His promises are sure.

Hopefully today as you think about the question on the imaginary survey I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, you might now be ready to check, I will be foolish, so long as it is God's foolishness, that foolishness that saves us sinners. Amen.