

**Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 6, 2016**  
**Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

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**1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (NIV)**

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. 19) For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20) Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21) For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.** 22) Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24) but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25) For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. 26) Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27) But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28) God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, 29) so that no one may boast before him. 30) It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31) **Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."**

Brothers & Sisters in Christ:

March Madness – the popular name for the NCAA basketball tournament which some claim to be the most compelling and greatest sporting event on earth is right around the corner. 68 teams will compete for the bragging rights of claiming to be the Number 1 college hoops team in the nation. It's part of our human nature to want to boast about our accomplishments. Children like to boast about how fast they can run or about their grades in school. Parents boast about their children and their accomplishments. Sports teams and athletes boast about their accomplishments. Scientists boast about their accomplishments. The Medical field has its own list of greatest accomplishments. And of course there are also great accomplishments in space exploration, technology and a host of other fields. The list of things that are regarded as the great accomplishments of men goes on and on. But all of this boasting is sheer madness because in the end none of it has any lasting value beyond this life time. That's why Paul concludes chapter one of 1 Corinthians with this thought:

Theme: Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord

1. He has set aside the wisdom of men
2. He has provided salvation through the foolishness of the cross

In order to put the theme of our text into perspective it is important for us to understand that Paul is extolling the value of the cross of Christ as the only way that leads to our eternal salvation. Sadly, God and his ways and plans have frequently come under attack by proud and boastful individuals. That is the way it was at the time of the apostle Paul in Corinth and that's the way it is today as well. Paul divides the people of his day into two groups: the Jews and the Gentiles (non Jews) or Greeks. **Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23) but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.**

For the Greeks in Corinth wisdom and philosophy ruled the day. It's not that much different today in many respects. Many hang on the latest wisdom promoted by the latest scientific claims. Many go from this guru to that philosopher seeking the newest insights. Others fall in step with the latest fade hyped by the medical or psychological community.

The Jews in Corinth weren't as impressed with wisdom and philosophy. It was power that impressed them. Prestige and power still draw many people away from Christ and his cross today.

Paul asks: **Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?** Where is all the world's wisdom? Has it ever saved anyone? Could it ever save anyone? When it comes to salvation the wise person is no help at all: The Jewish scribes, the Greek debater, the secular humanists of our age – none of them have come to the aid of the sinner with a rescue from sin and condemnation. None of them have devised a method of setting aside the consequences of our sins.

Yet the Greeks continued to look to wisdom – rejecting the cross as foolishness to their own peril as Paul declares: **For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.** They wanted a philosophy into which they could sink their teeth. They wanted something that made logical sense – something they could prove with their own thinking and something that was in agreement with their own intelligence. A crucified Savior, who was God in the flesh, well, that was just silly to the Gentile way of thinking.

The Jews of Paul's day wanted a show of power. Their history was filled with the evidence of God's miraculous power – yet they refused to bow to his authority and submit themselves to his ways. Jesus had done miracle after miracle showing his divine power and his authority over sin; healing sickness, raising the dead, feeding the hungry with miraculous food from his own hand. Yet it wasn't enough for them. In their stubborn pride and self-righteousness, they rejected Christ and his righteousness. They resisted the Holy Spirit's efforts to bring them to humble repentance. And so for them the cross became a scandal – a stumbling block – something that ensnared and trapped them in their sins.

Today men look for Christ to end wars, eliminate poverty, to banish suffering, to assure civil rights. But Christ never promised those things. In fact Christ foretold that such problems would plague the world until the end of time – further evidence of man's failures to undo the effects of sin.

Jews, Greeks, Gentiles, the year 50 AD or the year 2016 AD – it makes no difference. Sinful people naturally expect something else from God than what he gives them. He gives them a risen Savior and they demand "signs." He gives them the treasures of his Word with its heavenly wisdom and knowledge and they want their own kind of wisdom. But God will have none of that!

And that was a good thing for the Christians in Corinth as Paul reminded them. **Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.** Among their number was Erastus, the director of public works in Corinth but he was one of the few of high standing who was numbered among the believers. By and large the leading citizens of Corinth shunned the Christians. The men of wealth, the city fathers, the merchant princes, the scholars, the first families of the city would have nothing to do with that crazy religion a traveling Jew was peddling in Corinth.

And the same is thing is basically true today. How many of the people who control the press and television in county, how many leading entertainers, how many industrial magnates, how many noted scholars, how many world powers are simple Bible believing, church going, Christ worshipping Christians?

**God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.** Think of it, if our salvation were dependant on a high IQ or great learning or a noble mind or a flawless character, well then no one could or would be saved. But since the Gospel demands nothing from us – there is hope for all. God set aside the human way of doing things because those ways just won't work when it comes to salvation. Instead he chose to operate in a way that rules out human wisdom and

power so that man's boasting in himself and his efforts would be ruled out. God insisted that our salvation would be the result of his grace alone and that he himself would receive the glory due his saving name. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV) **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- (9) not by works, so that no one can boast.**

Therefore let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. 1. He has set aside the wisdom of men. 2. He has provided salvation through the foolishness of the cross.

What the wisdom and power of man could not accomplish – namely the salvation of our souls and rescue from sin, death God was able accomplish in his own, so-called, foolish way. **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.**

The message of the cross – it's nicely summarized in John 3. **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (15) that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."** (John 3:14-15 NIV)

In his letter to the Colossians the Apostle Paul explains more about that wonderful cross of Christ reminding us: (Colossians 2:13-15 NIV) **When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, (14) having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (15) And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**

On the cross God's own Son offered his perfect life as a sacrifice for our sins. He placed himself under God's wrath suffering our eternal punishment. He laid down his life for us only to take it up again on the day of his glorious resurrection which declared his defeat of Satan and all his allies.

Sin, death, the power of the Devil – they can harm us none. They were overcome by the cross of Christ. That was the message that Paul proclaimed. This was the message which God used to call the Christians in Corinth to faith. **God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.** Those who reject this message are perishing because they regard it as being too foolish or too weak for them. But non-the-less Paul would continue to proclaim that Gospel message with confidence that it alone could change the hearts and minds of men. He proclaimed: (Romans 1:16 NIV) **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.**

This is the message which God has used to call us to faith and assure us also of our salvation. (Romans 10:17 NIV) **Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.**

And so together with Paul we rejoice in the Lord and confess: (Ephesians 2:4-5 NIV) **because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, (5) made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace [we] have been saved.** As we are reminded in (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV) **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- (9) not by works, so that no one can boast.**

No one can boast except in the Lord. As Paul wrote following our text: **It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.**

By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit has called us to faith in Christ Jesus through the message of the Gospel. We know Christ Jesus to be true wisdom, for this is true wisdom: to know God and Jesus Christ whom he sent to give us eternal life. (Cf. John 17:3) God's wisdom made his son to be our righteousness. Through his resurrection from the dead he was declared the Righteous One. Through faith, we possess the robe of his perfect righteousness. God's wisdom made his Son to be our holiness. He is the source of and the motivation for our sanctification. Because of him, we have been set apart as a holy people, a people belonging to God that we might declare his praises. God's wisdom made his Son to be our Redemption. His blood paid the price of our release from sin and has washed us clean. Because of our connection to Christ and his cross (Ephesians 1:7 NIV) **We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.**

All of this is grace – God's undeserved love for sinners. And all of this gives us reason to boast not in ourselves but in the Lord. We were nothing, we had nothing, we could do nothing. Now we are something, and we have everything through our Savior and the foolishness of the cross. **Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."** Amen.