

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans  
“God’s foolishness, God’s weakness”  
1 Corinthians 1: 19 - 31  
Pastor Jonathan

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Holy Communion

Have you ever known anyone who has sacrificed so you could get ahead? What did they do to make sure you had an advantage? How did they look at their sacrifice? What did it cost them in time, money, power, or position? Some of us wonder at the great sacrifice our parents gave us. Perhaps we didn’t appreciate it until we became parents. And perhaps our children will not notice until they become parents, perhaps never at all. And so on with their children as they grow up and become parents. What does it take for us to notice the sacrifice of those who do so for us, often without our even knowing it?

The whole Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ comes at a great price to Him. His offer of relationship with us comes at the cost of his very self. As we come to His table today, we need to remember He gave Himself for us, which is why we can be at the table in the first place. He calls us to his upside down ethics of sacrifice, from our place of self-seeking. He calls us to true communion with Himself.

Sacrifice is counter-intuitive. It doesn’t make sense in this “I need to get ahead” world in which we live. It doesn’t make sense in this “I get to do what I want and I don’t care what you say about it” world. In these days increasingly, we only have my truth and your truth, not God’s truth, not God’s way. Everything is relative. Do what you like. Calling anyone to any standard in this world’s wisdom is a reduction of the individual and therefore unacceptable, by the world’s reckoning.

In 1 Corinthians 1:19 Paul bursts onto the stage, quotes Isaiah 29:14 which says “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” He calls us back to consider the torturing instrument of the Romans, that tortured the lowest of the low slaves to death in a disgusting way that turns our stomachs when we consider it even for a moment. He calls us back to consider the broken human body on the side of the road as a billboard for scaring people into not even considering the crime of which they were convicted. He calls us back to what any thinking or educated person would consider absolute foolishness and disgusting weakness. The cross was the ultimate expression of God’s foolishness and

weakness. How could God let His Son go through such a thing? The answer: For you and for me.

The cross was just a crazy way to die, and those who do not know why Jesus went through such a thing could not understand it. The cross is foolishness to those who don't know God and God's plan. They don't know that it is the way Jesus paid for the penalty of our sins, with his own life. They don't see that the penalty of sin is death, eternal separation from God. They don't see that we can't pay that price but Jesus can in his righteousness and status as fully God and fully human. So for them the cross is a no capitol letter "t" on top of a building indicating the building has some religious meaning. If "they" is you...you can accept Jesus and his cross and receive all the benefits this morning of knowing Him.

The cross is the way Jesus brings us to God, forgives our sin, satisfies the Law and brings us a verdict of not guilty to all of us who deserve the death penalty. We only need to accept what He has done for us. His is the most beautiful gift in the whole world. The ultimate irony is that God became one of us, and we torture Him to death; from which He offers us eternal life as his freely given sacrifice. That is the weakness and foolishness of God, which is greater than any human wisdom or human strength. That is the power of God at work to offer us eternal life when we were hopeless on our own.

Where are the wise ones, scholars and philosophers? Unfortunately many of them are in seminaries and universities, teaching against the reliability, necessity and essential nature of the Bible. They tell us, many of them, that Jesus was just another man, no one special. They tell us that the Scripture is not worth the hours taken to transmit it faithfully to our day. They tell us it is unreliable and unhelpful. They are the foolish ones of our day.

God sent foolish preachers such as Paul to try to convince those without God, that they could know Him and follow Him. But strangely, they still demanded more. Jewish people in Paul's day demanded to see miracles or "signs and wonder." They did seem them and mostly did not believe. Some did believe. The Greeks wanted the newest and best worldly wisdom: freedom to do and be whatever they wanted: Full sexual freedom of any kind. Full freedom to get ahead personally, no matter what it did to others, because it's all about personal freedom, isn't it?

But then Paul pointed to the crucified Messiah, the Christ on a cross on the side of the road. How could such a thing be? How could you even imagine the King who would restore the Kingdom hanging in torturous pain on that instrument of death? No, that would cause any good Jewish person to reject it and say that “anyone hanged on a tree was cursed.” (Deuteronomy 21:23)

There is no good news there, only the cursed and the damned. Yet, it was there that Jesus took our curse on Himself, took pity on our being damned, and took the penalty on Himself that we deserved. A Jewish person only received this thought as a stumbling block, as an inconceivable end to the One who would rescue Israel.

And for Greeks, for Gentiles (non-Jews), there was nothing intelligent or wise about a Saviour who couldn't save Himself. Remember what the one thief said who was crucified next to Him? If you are the King of the Jews, as it says there on the charges, “if you are Christ, save yourself and us!” (Luke 23: 39) It was his mocking Jesus, both from his own place of pain, and Jesus in the midst of His. From that cross, he mocked the Lord. And from that other cross, the other criminal asked, “Don't you fear God...” We are punished justly...but this man has done nothing wrong... “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And so we have the three crosses above the church where you came in, and on our sign. The one cross belongs to our Lord. The other two are the places of mocking and believing. Every day you and I must decide if we will mock or ignore our Lord, or if we will trust Him, even if we are in pain, even if we don't understand everything we are going through, even if our national church makes wrong decisions in controversial matters... We can choose to trust Jesus. We can choose to follow Him in our pain, in our suffering, in our hopeful and wonderful moments, in our terrible and most frightening moment, we can choose to trust Jesus. He will lead us. And we will be with Him in paradise, even as He promised the criminal next to him.

Jesus didn't choose us to follow him because of our beauty, attractiveness, looks, wealth, position, power, influence, nobility or because we deserve to be His followers. No. Jesus offers his Gospel to those who acknowledge their need, their brokenness, their shame, their rebellion, their rejection of Him and His truth, but now turn to Him for mercy. His table is that place to say directly Him, that you need Him, want Him and will choose Him from now on... God's Gospel calls us away from thinking that if we just had more money, or more power or more influence or a better job, or a better family or

a better name or a better situation, or better health, you name it...He calls us as we are to stoop down to hear him, to be vulnerable about our weaknesses and our shame, for God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and the the weak things of the world to shame the strong. It is in our weakness and vulnerability before God, that we receive His strength to live. It is in our willingness to accept the truth of his foolish cross that gives us relationship with Himself. As we hit bottom, as we acknowledge our need, as sinners, broken, needy, helpless, that we receive His strength and wisdom.

The lowly and despised things in our lives that bring us again to remember why we need a Saviour, are the very things that remind us we cannot boast in ourselves or our abilities or our gifts, but rather only boast in the One who gave everything to show us the wisdom of God, in lowly service and sacrifice. Jesus is now our righteousness, holiness and redemption. So we boast in Him. We boast in the fact that He will lead us through this difficult year. He is faithful to us, even when we are not faithful to Him. He holds us stronger than we hold Him. Do you believe that? I hope so.

Jesus' truth is stronger than any worldly truth. His way is the right way, the way of wisdom, but often upside down to what we have been taught in this world. We will need to decide who we follow as we come to His table today.

If we are afraid, simply say so. If we are feeling weak, just admit it. If we are wondering what the future holds, personally, and as a group here, just bring it to the Lord. He knows. He wants us to bring it to Him. Is there something in your life that is holding you back from knowing Him better? Give it to Him now. At least bring it up, even if you feel you can't let it go. As we come to His table, we come to place letting go of our burdens and letting God take them. What is your burden today? Please leave it at the cross.

The cross is the epicenter of history. There we see the great divide. Let us embrace the cross, the foolishness and weakness of it, as the deepest wisdom and greatest strength we will ever know.

Let us pray.