



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (C) – 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Focus: *God's Foolishness*

word of life

“For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:25 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Jesus Christ died on a cross, was buried, and rose again. That is the core of our Christian faith, but many people who hear this confession only shake their heads. It is too extreme, too absurd, and too foolish!

1. *Why do some people think the cross is foolish?*
2. *How do you respond to those who consider the death and resurrection of Jesus to be an idle tale?*

In his letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul directly responds to those who think of the cross as sheer folly. This congregation struggled with internal conflict and self-destructing behavior. Elsewhere in his letter, Paul addresses some of the foolish behavior of the Corinthians. But in this passage, Paul contrasts the foolishness of God and the wisdom of humans.

In doing so, Paul develops key elements in his theology of the cross (as opposed to a theology of glory). “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18 NRSV)

3. *How do you connect the message about the cross with the power of God?*
4. *What does the phrase “theology of the cross” mean?*

Who can equal God in wisdom? Who was there when the earth was formed? Who might debate God about the mysteries of this world? And a key question: Why did God create us with a limited ability for wisdom? It is a humbling (but essential) step in self-awareness to realize we are not God, nor will we ever have God’s fullness of wisdom. Any wisdom we might have is a gift of grace from God. “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:25 NRSV)

5. *Give an example of God’s foolishness being wiser than human wisdom.*
6. *Give an example of God’s weakness being stronger than human strength.*

It is not within our human capacity to make sense or explain God’s choice of using a cross as an instrument of salvation. It is reasonable for people to want detailed explanations about God’s actions in Jesus Christ. “For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24 NRSV)

7. *Why do people perceive the crucified Christ as a stumbling block?*
8. *How might Paul’s words help those who see the cross as a stumbling block?*

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong... so that no one might boast in the presence of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29 NRSV) Consequently, we are wise to boast in the Lord—the one crucified on a cross.

9. *Give an example of boasting in the Lord.*

Word among us

Some college students met regularly to play volleyball, followed by supper. Usually the conversation over the meal became as heated as the competitive volleyball game. No matter the topics covered in the conversation, the discussion inevitably turned to religion.

Some of the group had grown up in the church but had begun to doubt their belief in Jesus Christ. It was difficult to reconcile the teachings from Sunday school with their academic training at the university. A few wanted facts and proof about salvation through Jesus Christ.

1. *How would you respond to young adults who are seeking understanding about Jesus Christ?*
2. *What role does campus ministry have in helping young adults sort through their beliefs?*
3. *What is important to keep in mind when conversing with someone who has doubts about their faith?*

Faith is not something automatically passed down from one generation to the next generation. We can teach, model, and encourage faith, but each person has to claim his or her own belief. It can be frustrating and challenging to watch someone wrestle with spiritual issues—especially someone we deeply love.

There are times we entrust our loved ones and their questions to the wisdom of God, knowing the Holy Spirit is at work in each of us. There are times we openly admit we do not have the answers, but we trust in the wisdom of God to reveal those answers in good time—perhaps not until the other side of the grave. There are times we embrace the mystery of God’s love shown in the crucified Christ and simply respond, “Amen.”

4. *How difficult is it for you to respond when people question Christianity? Explain your answer.*
5. *How difficult is it for you to trust in God’s wisdom? Explain your answer.*

faith practice in daily life

Hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper

Hear the word of God! “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18 NRSV)

Hear the word of God! “...but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:23-24 NRSV)

Hear the word of God! “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:31 NRSV)

Paul’s words written to the Corinthians in the first century are worthy of our attention today. Even at our best, we are limited in understanding the wisdom of God at work in our world.

6. *Summarize Paul’s message for us today.*

Prayer

Source of all Wisdom, give us words and courage to proclaim Christ crucified in all we do and say.
Amen

last word

This week, humbly hear the word of God with all of its wisdom.

Daily Faith Practices

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