

Lenten Devotional February 21, 2021

Scripture

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

18 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. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. 26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 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; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Devotional

The Rev. Mark Gaskill '03

This passage is a terrible sales pitch. I will paraphrase a few of the highlights: "The cross is a ridiculous way to save the world," "God picks stuff that doesn't make sense to anyone, Jew or Greek," "Oh, and all of us who follow Jesus, we're pretty much just a bunch of losers—that's how we know this is really God working in us."

The reality today is that churches are failing. Some of us are failing numerically; declining attendance, membership, and commitment can be plotted on gloomy graphs and dire charts. In that scenario, we think we have to find a better sales pitch, so we try (too hard) to be something other than what we are. Others may be growing numerically but failing spiritually. They have abandoned the message of the cross to some degree in favor of something that seems less foolish to the comfortable and the privileged, and there they have found a market niche.

It is difficult for the human ego to accept the terms Christ offers us. Paul was no exception; he had to do it the hard way. He fought with himself and with others to keep focused on the reality that he was not the one who was responsible for doing the saving—God had to do it.

How do you "sell" *your* church? Do you tell people how ridiculous you are? Do you admit that you can't do anything that's good on your own? Do you confess that you are a sinner, for real, and that some of your sins are pretty bad?

False humility will not avail in this world—people are too used to being lied to and sold scams. The only place to be right now, if we want to live, is with God's foolishness, which is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness, which is stronger than human strength.

Prayer

Help us, Holy God, for we want so badly to be wise and strong. We spend so much time and energy seeking to project positivity and success. It is exhausting. We need to be vulnerable, but we just can't seem to trust that it will work. Teach us what it means to offer our broken hearts to you. Bind up the wounds we carry from trying too hard. If we fail, let us fail as Christ failed on the cross—if we succeed, it will only be in Christ. Amen.