

March 3, 2024  
Third Sunday in Lent

“Blessed Folly”

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

If you have been in a Bible study with me for any length of time you have probably heard me rant about our culture’s obsession with self-esteem. We’ve been brainwashed into thinking high self-esteem is critical for our children’s success when the clinical data says otherwise. We want to feel good about ourselves and a lot of that depends on how we perceive others viewing us. Social media, of course, has only exacerbated this as folks attempt to present the perfect picture of themselves on Facebook or Instagram or whatever. People get very caught up in how family, friends, coworkers and community regard them.

But this is nothing new, we just have fancier terms for it. Throughout biblical history it’s just all lumped together in what is called “pride,” and it’s never a good thing in the eyes of God. St. Paul makes clear the danger of pride working over and against the Gospel in his letter to the church at Corinth.

If you allow your pride, your self-esteem, to be grievously wounded if others think poorly of you, you are going to struggle in your faith. Simply put, the world thinks Christians are idiots. That’s just the way it is...and not just because we can see it in our culture today...because that’s what St. Paul writes by the leading of God’s Holy Spirit: *“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* “Folly,” that’s how those outside of Christ view us Christians.

If you rightly see Christ crucified, it destroys your pride and self-esteem because in His innocent flesh he wears your grievous sin in horrific wounds and suffering, exposing how far you fall short of being a “good person.” You have no argument. You have no excuse. You have no standing. You’re guilty, and Jesus is Lord because He takes that from you there, giving you what you completely lack—His innocence and His righteousness, His esteem in the eyes of the Father.

But folks have their pride, and they don’t like to part with it. Thus, the cross becomes unacceptable to them; ridiculous. Throughout Christian and pre-Christian history religious leaders have attempted to add good works and obedience to the mix of God’s mercy and forgiveness, because then they have something of themselves to hold up before God—pride. We still have a good bit of that going on in the church today.

But more so in modern times the true nature of the cross is hidden in the church. Sure, churches will display crosses and proclaim the love of Christ, but the sin made manifest in Jesus’ suffering is downplayed if mentioned at all. The shame of the cross that necessarily drives one to repentance is avoided and many churches now rubber-stamp many obvious sins as being acceptable. Why? Because if you don’t rightly look at Christ crucified, then you don’t rightly see those horrible sins and you can easily hold onto both your sin, and your self-esteem. You’re still a good person.

How do they do this? Easy. In their pride they make themselves smarter than God, or at the very least they insist that God must be answerable to them. And I’ve got to give kudos to the atheists on this one—at least they’re straightforward about this. But church folk? They’ll find all sorts of “reasonable” ways to subvert, redefine or simply ignore God’s clear will for His creation, yet still hold their heads up high.

The Jewish leaders demanded of Christ after He had cleared the money changers from the temple, *“What sign do you show us for doing these things?”* In other words, “We decided it’s

was peachy keen to turn God's house into a profit center, you'd best do something spectacularly divine to prove us wrong." Jesus responds with the sign of all signs, saying of His own body, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" He speaks of Christ crucified, but when that sign comes to pass most of those Jews will be too smart in their own thinking to receive it. Doing so would still their pride, having to admit their sin and humbly, shamefully cast it at Christ's cross.

But we struggle with this also. Bad, sinful practices work their way into our lives and we rationalize, make excuses, and find ways to live with them. We do that rather than see them in the light of Christ crucified where their toxicity and evil is obvious.

We gossip, because it feeds our pride to tear somebody else down, and then we justify it by saying "I'm a pretty good person" so I'm allowed such criticism. You can't say such a thing before Christ's cross where your guilt is made plain.

We harbor anger and grudges against people as if we are righteous. Sexual activity takes place outside of marriage we give it society's stamp of approval and say that's good enough for God despite His design of purity and marriage. We toss the name of God around and make "Jesus Christ" a synonym with "What the hell" and think nothing of it because it's just words, despite the clear Word of God. We overrule God with our worldly reason as a matter of course, and we're good with that...if we don't raise our eyes to the cross of Jesus where it is nothing but horrible and wrong.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, if we willingly walk in these behaviors and thinking long enough, at what point are we no longer simply failing to look at the crucified Christ but joining with the world saying He is folly; that this Christianity thing is idiotic?

It happens. Think about it, how many of you have friends, maybe even family, who might claim to be a believer but don't live it out in their lives and if you challenge them with some simple, basic Christian admonishment about their sin would just snort at you and say, "Don't be stupid" as if God's revealed Word is basically meaningless? It happens.

And for we who do believe, who have the blessed Gospel truth through the gift of the Holy Spirit, nothing could be more idiotic than to avert our eyes from Christ crucified because doing so afflicts our precious self-esteem in exposing vile sin. "*The word of the cross...it is the power of God!*"

Seeing your sin on the cross does nothing for your pride and self-esteem, but it definitely does something with the sin! It forgives it! He forgives it! It takes you sin away!

That's why it is folly to those who are perishing—they don't want their sins taken away. They are content with the sin and happy with themselves wallowing in it. To leave sin behind and follow Christ in faith unto glory makes no sense to them!

But that's not you! Don't let that be you. Right here, right now, I'm hoping those sins have come to your mind and if they did, I bet they look horrible. Praise be to God then, because you are seeing them in light of Christ crucified. And in this you're begging Christ's pardon and I can tell you, the power of God from Christ's cross has accomplished its purpose. Your sin is paid for, you shall not die. Thank you, Jesus.

Now forget your pride. Forget your self-esteem. Shun those worldly ways of thinking that attempt to outsmart God and make clever accommodation for sin in your life. It doesn't work and God deals with it harshly, "*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.*"

No, submit to God's wisdom. "*For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*" What could be more foolish than a holy God humbling

Himself into our humanity to die on a cross for we who rebel against Him? What is weaker than the man there dying? But this is God's wisdom in love doing the work that is stronger than man's sinfulness, removing it by His blood that we would be His forever.

Don't be too proud for that. Don't be too smart for that. Continually look to Christ crucified. See your horrible sin there. See His oh so foolish love there. Repentantly and joyfully, let His cross have its way with you.

Amen.