

February 1, 2026

Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany

Eternal Fools

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

You may have found yourself in this situation once or twice. You are having a discussion and whether it was intentional or not, you start discussing God, the Bible, faith and such. You witness to what you believe about your salvation in Christ. And then the questions begin. “But don’t you think good people of other religions are saved?” “Why would a loving God allow such awful things to happen in the world?” “Does St. Paul hate women?” “How can God forgive truly evil people like murderers and rapists?” “Doesn’t God want you to be happy?” It becomes clear the person you’re dealing with doesn’t quite believe what Scripture says, and what’s more, they seem intent on challenging what you know to be true.

Suddenly you feel awkward and like you’re leaning back on your heels because you don’t have all the answers to defend your faith and you feel kind of foolish. Maybe it is fear of just this situation that causes us to refrain from bearing witness to Christ. I get it. But St. Paul’s words today should give us great comfort in that exact situation. *“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.”*

In light of these words, why on earth would we ever feel ashamed if somebody thinks we’re an idiot for believing in Christ? The word of the cross is not folly to us; it’s the Gospel good news! It is the power of God to vanquish our sin, make us holy before Him and save us even from death itself. If unbelievers see us as foolish, it is just confirmation that we stand saved in Christ—it is folly to them, but we know the power of God in Christ.

Why then, are we so hesitant to follow Christ so boldly that we look silly? This is an issue that St. Paul is addressing in this letter. The Corinthian Christians, much like us today, were negatively influenced by the culture around them, and they cared much too deeply about what that culture thought of them. They were getting caught up in the worldly philosophical culture that made idols out of their learned teachers; kind of little cults chasing celebrity personalities. Apparently they’d somewhat done this even with their Christians teachers, thus what we heard Paul say last week about following Apollos or Paul or Cephas, etc. In being a follower of “the wisest” they sought their own status, standing and superiority over others around them, much of this conferred by supposed “wisdom”.

It’s kind of tough for us to understand because there’s not a lot of following the cool philosopher going on in our culture. But we chase status also. We like to be seen as intelligent by others. We want other to think we’re successful, influential and have our life in order.

Paul makes clear that chasing your own ideas, agendas and glory has no part with a follower of Christ. That’s what worldly people do, chase the fallen world and their vaunted place in it. The intelligent people of the world know it is wise to do this because in it there is great reward. Only the foolish would count it all as loss for a God who promises no worldly gain and even calls His followers to humility and service and those oh so lowly things: suffering and sacrifice.

But that is exactly how the God of our salvation works. *“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”*

The Jews sought a Messiah that would gain them the world, but Jesus died to the world for our sakes. The Greeks sought a human wisdom that supposedly exalted them to a loftier state, but Jesus took the lowest place of all on the cross and calls His people to follow His humble example. If you're chasing the world, following Jesus is nuts!

Yet you have been called to know better! You know Christ crucified is Lord; the Lord leading us to follow Him through this life in His footsteps, counting all as loss for His sake, yet ultimately dwelling in His glory beyond this life. You are blessed to be the foolish ones who stand saved in Christ!

You are called to this by the Holy Spirit. You know this is true by the way you hear the Beatitudes in our Gospel reading. Anybody who is of the world is like "Poor in spirit? Meek and mourning? Merciful and pure in heart? That's no fun! There is no reward in that!" Yet you hear Christ's words and, while they might be daunting, you know they are true and you know they are best and you long to live a life within their calling. They're silly according to the world, but the wisdom of God to you, because you are called by His Gospel.

Yet, like the Christians at Corinth, we also are influenced by the worldly culture around us. We can be seduced by the call of worldly respect, worldly gain, worldly thinking. This can be pretty easy to recognize when it's happening because fear is not hard to spot. It can be fear of loss when called on to sacrifice. It can be fear of ridicule for refusing to go along with the crowd. It can be fear of being taken advantage of because of your willingness to serve in love. All sorts of fear.

But in accordance with today's text, I'd like us all to recognize and resist the particular fear of looking stupid for Jesus' sake. There is absolutely no good reason to fear being a fool for Christ. Why wouldn't you? God has continually chosen the lowly, the humble, the barren, the despised, to accomplish His work, to call people to faith, to bring about our salvation, Jesus Himself being the greatest example. Paul is as much as calling the Corinthians fools who shame the wise, but they are the ones he calls "saved".

Why hesitate to be boldly faithful before others? To save face? To save you from embarrassment? To not risk your reputation and standing in the eyes of others? If that's the case, let me ask you this: Isn't that you just trying to save face before the world so that you can have something of yourself to boast about before the world? (You know, so nobody can say you're a fool?)

"God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

You stand called to boast in the Lord because you are saved for eternity. Don't be afraid to be a fool for Christ, be eager! You know and belong to the God of salvation. What's the world going to do to you? Why care what the world thinks? Only God's opinion of you matters! In Christ, He treasures you beyond measure.

And yes, you may get some blowback. You may get ridiculed. You might lose friends, not get invited to parties, make people look at you funny. If that happens, count it as a badge of honor to the Christ who said, *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven..."*

Don't be intimidated by the world and let it stop you from being a fool for Jesus. *"It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to **save those who believe.**"* We fools for Jesus are the ones who live with Him now and forever.

Amen.