

"Why We Can Trust Our God"

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

God grant us the grace to recognize just how good we've got it – in Christ – and therefore also just how much we have to lose. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: Do you ever get tired of choices? Tired of selection? I do. Generally speaking I'm pretty easy to please – unless there is a selection. Then nothing seems quite good enough.

I recall awhile back helping my son figure out which new washing machine to buy. First we looked to see what was out there, and found that there were just over 73 million different models. That's an exaggeration, of course, but the selection was mind-numbing. So we scoured the internet for recommendations, read reviews, looked at Consumer Reports and other ratings organizations... and became even more confused. Every make and model that was highly recommended also had sixty reviews that said, *"Whatever you do, don't buy this model."* Finally it all came together as we found one that carried the highest ratings and was on sale. He got it all installed - and it didn't work. Back it went. So, go with another just like it or start over. A rough rock along the nearest riverbed started to look like a good option.

Sometimes the old Soviet model starts to look pretty good. *"Here is your pair of shoes, here is your coat, and here is your loaf of bread. We only have one of each."* In almost every facet of our lives we are inundated with choices. There are dozens of different choices for every breakfast, hundreds of different clothing combinations, several hundred choices regarding what to do for lunch and dinner, and a virtually unlimited number of things to do with our free time. We have more television channels than we could (or should) watch in a hundred lifetimes. We have millions of books at our beck and call in an ever-growing number of formats. We have more than enough clothing and grocery stores right here in Bismarck to feed and clothe most Third World countries.

Like it or not, life on earth requires decisions – all the time. Such a society requires maturity, and we are proving to be not very mature. We are not limited by poverty or the need to work 16 hours each day *just to feed ourselves and survive*. The fact that obesity, alcoholism, and drug addiction plague this country are all evidence that as a society we lack the maturity necessary to make consistently good decisions. It should not surprise us therefore that we are also prone to bad decisions in our spiritual lives. In fact our text for today points out to us just how wrong-minded we can be when it comes to spiritual decisions. That text is found

recorded in the First Letter of Paul to the Church in Corinth, the First Chapter:

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 1:26-31** *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly 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, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

These are the words of our God. In thankful acknowledgment that these are indeed his words, and with the prayer that we might benefit also this morning from the study of these words, we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

If you were just elected president, how or where would you start? I'd start with people. I'd gather the very best people I could find and surround myself with talent – partly because you would need good people to protect the boss from himself. That is, in fact, how most successful people operate. They surround themselves with the best and brightest. It is only the insecure that surround themselves with mediocrity.

Now suppose you were going to start a church. Not just any church, THE Church – the Holy Christian Church. Where would you start? Whom would you gather around you? Whom would you put in charge in your absence? Most of us would probably agree that there too (*especially* there) we would choose carefully and pick only the very best.

But what did God do? Whom did Jesus pick? A couple of fishermen, a tax collector, a guy who turned out to be a thief and a traitor, and some other guys like James the Less, Simon the Zealot, and Thaddeus (also called Jude) that we still know pretty much nothing about.

Ever ask yourself why he picked those that he did? Wouldn't it seem logical that when beginning something as critically important as the New Testament Christian Church that Jesus would somehow scour the countryside for the first 30 years of his life to find only the very best

and the very brightest? So why didn't he? Why did he pick the men he did? Why, for that matter, did he pick you and me?

By way of an answer, let me read to you the verses that immediately precede our text for this morning. These words, together with our text, teach us a basic, yet critical, truth: **1 Corinthians 1:18-25** *For 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.* 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, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.* ²² *For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,* ²⁴ *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵ *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

These words, together with our text, teach us to think differently. They teach us not to proceed as the world proceeds, not to use their logic or their plan for success. Here we are taught to look for the *foolishness* of God and the *weakness* of God – at least as the world sees such things – and to recognize therein the power of God.

Our text teaches us that God has always filled not only the church pews but also the pastoral robes with something other than what the world would consider "the best and the brightest." Why would he do that? Because by and large the wise, the powerful, the influential wanted nothing whatsoever to do with him. They rejected what God was offering in Jesus Christ as not just useless but demeaning, insulting, or just plain silly. God wanted to save them, he just didn't pick them to lead his church. The reason is evident. The wise and powerful always find it necessary to impose their will, their stamp or influence, on everything they come in contact with. In other words, they are never content to let God call the shots and to let God alone dictate truth and wisdom.

Does that then mean that all Christians today are stupid, ignorant, and unsophisticated? To the world (by definition) yes. To God, no. We say "by definition" because the very fact that we believe implicitly all that the Bible teaches makes us all foolish and ignorant in the eyes of the godless. Always has and always will. In God's eyes however it is just the opposite, but this is the difficult lesson that we need to learn. It is another way that

we need to learn to think (as much as is possible) as God does, and to see ourselves and our fellow human beings as God sees.

The big road-block here is that we are still drawn both to the Jewish demand and to the Greek error. Remember how we read, **"For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom"**? That's the pattern to which you and I are also naturally drawn. The Jews in Bible times demanded signs – miracles – before they would "believe," yet even when Jesus and his disciples gave them such signs, they demonstrated that they really weren't interested in what he was offering. The Greeks (the non-Jews) demanded that everything make sense – *to them*. They held up their own understanding as the standard that God had to meet. Although it's hard to imagine anything more arrogant and prideful, we often have the same tendencies when we approach God's Word. Need evidence? Have you ever read something in God's Word that didn't make sense to you, or maybe conflicted with something you believed to be true, *and doubted or questioned the Word rather than yourself*? Whole segments of "Christianity" today do that all the time. They read of God's roles for men and women – and doubt the Word rather than themselves. They read about miracles, and doubt the Word rather than themselves, because everyone knows that's just not how things happen in the real world. They read about God's condemnation of various *popular* sins, and doubt the Word rather than themselves. This is just modern evidence that Greeks are still seeking wisdom, and that what they find on the pages of God's holy Word still represents foolishness to them.

Now, if we know such things to be true, then obviously God does too. He knew that you and I wouldn't pick him, so he picked us. We could not and would not choose what he was offering, so he chose us.

Think on that for a moment. Let it really sink in and fill your world. The fact that God chose you is evidence enough that you can and should trust him to choose *for* you. Go back to the very beginning. The moment we sinned, God could have, and would have been perfectly justified had he chosen to simply destroy mankind. Worse still, he would have been perfectly justified in allowing us to destroy ourselves. He didn't, did he? Instead he *chose* to sacrifice his greatest treasure – his own Son, Jesus Christ. He could have demanded something from us, something arduous and painful – something *we* would have to provide. He didn't. He chose to have his own Son provide all that was needed. He chose to have his Son come to earth to do what we could not and would not do. He chose to have his son provide the perfect obedience to his Word and will that we could not. This Jesus did, and then God chose to credit that life and death of his own Son as the

satisfactory payment for all that we continue to do wrong. This is the plan God chose to save us. And then, since we couldn't even come to believe on our own – or to keep on believing once he brought us to faith – God chose to do both for us. By his Holy Spirit he brought us to faith, and by that same Spirit he preserves us moment by moment in that faith.

The God that would do that for us – the God that would make such choices – can now be trusted to make all of those lesser choices for us day by day, moment by moment. He can be trusted to choose our friends, our spouse (or lack thereof), our school, our career, the time of our retirement, how we spend our free-time and how we spend our money. All of it. How exactly does he "choose for us"? He gives such guidance in his Word, and the most concise summary was laid out in 1 Corinthians 10:31: **"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."** If God's children would approach every decision, every choice in life on that basis, the vast majority of our choices may not be easy, but they will be both simple and clear.

Once again everything points always and only to Christ. He is our wisdom. He is the thing that is absolutely *just right* in our lives. Christ came to save the *unworthy*. He died to pay for *sin* – my sin. He gave his life to save those who are nothing in the eyes of the world. The wise and powerful of this world have a hard time coming to grips with such truths. Man naturally wants to believe that he is somehow worthy of what Christ did, and that the beautiful and gifted of this world are somehow even more worthy of what Jesus did. All such ideas are, from first to last, wrong. They are, in God's eyes, foolishness. Christ alone has made us what we are – God's children. The Apostle Paul in our text resolved to glory always and only in the Lord for a very simple reason: our God, our Savior, alone is worthy.

Note finally that although God chose the poor, weak, and foolish, our text says nothing of remaining poor, weak, and foolish after God has made us his own. But we need to learn to think as he thinks, to see as he sees, and to desire *his* will in our lives. We are to recognize that now we are his Ambassadors, his representatives, and he desires great things (as he defines "great") both for us and from us. Remember, everything that you could ever need to better serve and glorify your God is available by request from the same God who created and preserves all things, in heaven and on earth. The God who chose to send his Son to save the likes of us can certainly now be trusted to guide and provide for us, until he calls us home. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Micah 6:1-8** Hear what the LORD says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. ² Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel. ³ "O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me!" ⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. ⁵ O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD." ⁶ "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" ⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

ESV **Matthew 5:1-12** Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ ¶ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E Divide Ave Bismarck, ND 58501

Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

www.bismarcklutheran.org mjroehl@bis.midco.net

Michael McEnroe, President (224-8335) Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – January 29, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 5 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Open Thou My Heart to Hear"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 5.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Micah 6:1-8) The Holy Spirit here addresses us through the Prophet Micah. His message is both clear and simple: To obey is better than to offer sacrifices. Though we can in no way earn our own forgiveness or salvation, yet it is the Lord's will that we obey his commands. This is how we naturally thank him for all that he has done for us – and continues to do for us every day of our lives.

The Gospel Lesson: (Matthew 5:1-12) Our Gospel Lesson is part of Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount. Together with our sermon text, this reading emphasizes the fact that God often chooses to glorify that which the world rejects. God grant that we never look down upon nor despise that which the Lord values highly – every single human soul.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 723 (Brown Hymnal)

"What Wondrous Love Is This"

The Sermon - Text: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (Printed on the back page)

"Why We Can Trust Our God"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 778 (Brown Hymnal)

"Grace Has a Thrilling Sound"

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Closing Hymn – 800 (Brown Hymnal)

"Go, My Children, with My Blessing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with congregations throughout the United States, as well as mission affiliates scattered around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance - Sunday (42) Average (48)

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Class
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to conduct a call meeting this afternoon in Lemmon, SD. Pastor Neal Radichel has returned the call to the tri-parish of Grace of Valentine. They have now called Pastor Paul Nolting. Pastor Rob Sauers has returned the call to Mt Zion of Detroit. Immanuel Lutheran, Mankato MN, has called Kristen Friedrichs to teach Social Studies and Brandan Heinze to teach Mathematics and Science at its school.

Church Council Meeting – The special Church Council meeting scheduled for this morning has been cancelled.

ILC Tour Choir – The ILC Tour Choir is scheduled to perform a concert here in Bismarck on Saturday, March 18th at 7:30 pm. 34 choir members will also need housing for that night. Plans call for an early departure for a Sunday morning concert in Jamestown. Please consider housing as many choir members as you can and record your intentions on the signup sheet on the mailbox table.

ILC After Banquet Party – The ILC After Banquet Committee is again looking for volunteers and/or donations to help with the project. Please see Pastor Roehl for more details.

CLC Women's Retreat – This year's theme is "Thy Will Be Done" and is based on Proverbs 3:5-6. It is scheduled April 21-23 in Winona, MN. See the poster on the entry table for further details.