

"Think and Choose Like 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.

Some time ago I remember helping one of my children pick out a new washing machine. 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. For every make and model recommended there were sixty reviews that said, *"Whatever you do, don't buy that model."* Finally it all came together as we found one that carried the highest ratings and was on sale. 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 smothered with choices. There are a dozen 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.

All of which means, 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 going to start a company, from scratch, 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 any company that I would try to start would need good people to protect the boss from himself. That is, in fact, how most successful people operate. Surround yourself with the best and brightest.

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 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? The short answer is that since Jesus picked them, they were obviously the right men for the job – perfectly suited for their individual callings. The better question is, "How and why were they perfectly qualified?"

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 the power of God therein.

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. Make no mistake. It wasn't that God didn't want them in his kingdom and working to advance that kingdom; it was that *they* wanted nothing at all to do with *him*.

Does that then mean that all Christians today are stupid, ignorant, unsophisticated? To the world, pretty much. By definition. To God, no. In fact in God's eyes 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 reckon as God

does, and to see ourselves and our fellow human beings as God sees. Only then will we start to make God-pleasing choices in this and many other areas.

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 – that's just not how things happen in the real world. They read about God's condemnation of today's most sins, and doubt the Word rather than themselves. This is just modern evidence that Greeks are still popular 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 it for 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 – would have been perfectly justified in – choosing to simply destroy mankind. Worse still, he would have been perfectly justified in allowing us to destroy ourselves. But he didn't. 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 it for us. 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 we accepted – 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 noble 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; 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, the definition of 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. We are to recognize that now we are his Ambassadors, his representatives, and he desires great things for us and from us. Those great things – all good and perfect gifts – are ready and waiting for you. Everything that you could ever need to serve your God better and more consistently is available by request from the same God who created and preserves all things, in heaven and on earth. But he, not you, needs to be the one that decides.

With the power available to us from our great God, let that God who first chose you also now make your choices for you. Let him guide you in all things – great and small. He has already made the greatest decision for you. Trust him with all the rest. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV}(**Isaiah 58:3-9**) 'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. ⁴ Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶ "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'

^{ESV}(**Matthew 5:13-20**) "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. ¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

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The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – February 9, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 400 (Red Hymnal)

"Take My Life and Let It Be"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 58:3-9) In the first part of this reading, Isaiah addresses a question or objection raised by the superficial Jews of his day. They were outwardly practicing the prescribed fasts, and they complained that God was not adequately rewarding them. Isaiah here identifies the problem, which was a heart condition. They were doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. The message for us today is that we continually need to reevaluate our actions, and especially the motivation for those actions.

Psalm 8 (Supplement page 27) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Matthew 5:13-20) Our Gospel lesson is a continuation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. While the law element in the sermon was intended to crush mankind's natural tendency toward work righteousness (and to recognize the need for a Savior) the Christian also now uses what Jesus here taught us as an infallible guide for our actions going forward. The works of a Christian are a thank you for the gift already received, not an attempt to pay for our sins.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 532 (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Way, Not Mine, O Lord"

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

"Think and Choose Like God"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 311 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Christ, My Blessed Savior"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 401 (Red Hymnal)

"Praise to Thee and Adoration"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (37) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Bowdle
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Mid-Week Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
	-11:20 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Bowdle and Ipswich have called Pastor Terrell Kesterson. Pastor David Schaller has returned the call to Berea of Sioux Falls. Teacher Paul Tiefel has returned the call to Trinity School of West Columbia. That school has now called Teacher Andrew Roehl, as has Faith of Markesan.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour next Sunday.

Care Packages – The deadline for bringing supplies for our two care packages is next Sunday, February 16.

CLC Events Calendar – An Events Calendar is compiled each year by Messiah of Eau Claire, which includes all CLC events for both youth and adults. Copies are available on the mailbox table. Please let Pastor Roehl know if you would like a pdf copy emailed to you.

Study Conference – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend a Study Conference in Bowdle on Monday.