

"Foolishness or Wisdom"

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

*What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, Dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
They pity without end?
Oh make me Thine forever!
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never,
Outlive my love for Thee. (TLH 172)*

Dear Fellow Christians, as you have no doubt gathered from the title, this morning we examine the difference between foolishness and wisdom. You don't really have to have lived all that long to know that certain beliefs or convictions switch teams from time to time. What was once considered foolish suddenly becomes wise, and what was once considered wise is suddenly foolish.

One thing that has *never* changed is the unbelieving world's view of the genuine Christian faith. That has always been written off as foolishness in their eyes. Always will be. The only difference is that now they have grown more brazen in their ridicule, more open about their rejection and scorn. One day they will be forced to change their minds, but then it will be too late. Which means that our job is to reach them now, before their door closes.

The world's ability to distinguish between wisdom and foolishness has always been suspect. Not all that long ago it was considered pure foolishness to imagine that human beings could just ask a question into the air and have a machine hear it, look up the answer, and speak it back to them. Foolishness to imagine that man could fly at all, let alone have 250 full grown adults, with all of their luggage, walk into a machine that would carry them 500 miles an hour 30,000 feet *in the air* across an ocean in quiet safety and comfort. Foolishness to imagine that man would walk on the moon. Foolishness to imagine that doctors could remove a heart from a recently deceased human being and to place it into the chest cavity of another human being, hook everything up, and have that heart start functioning normally again. Pure folly to imagine that we could all walk around with a device half the size of a deck of cards that would allow them to communicate instantly with every other person who has a similar device anywhere in the world.

You get the point. The fact that this or any other society regards something as foolish really means nothing. They've been wrong before; they will be wrong again. Our only safe haven of unchanging truth will always be God's Word. That part of God's wisdom that will instruct us on this very subject this morning is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the First Chapter:

ESV 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.*

This is God's Word. Trusting that our God will once again bless us through the study of these words of pure divine wisdom, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

We are in the sacred season of Lent. In fact we are now about halfway through that season. Lent is a time designed for each one of us to dedicate ourselves to the special contemplation of our own sinfulness on the one hand, and, on the other, the suffering and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus, by which our debt of sin was paid in full. Obviously the two are intimately connected, for it was our sin that caused Jesus' suffering and death.

How are you doing in that soul-searching? Have you started yet? Do you plan to spend time on it or is this maybe one of those things you have every intention of doing but just don't seem to get around to? The fact that you are hearing or reading this sermon indicates a good thing, for it is almost certainly an indication that you understand your own spiritual needs and the value and benefit of God's Word. Part of Christian growth and maturity is learning to appreciate Lent more and more as unique and irreplaceable. It is learning to regard it not as a burden or irritation that must be endured for a few weeks each year,

but as a God-given opportunity for comfort, growth, and strengthening – an oasis in a parched and arid spiritual wasteland.

While Christians seek to grow and mature in their view of and appreciation for the blessings offered to us in Lent, the world takes the exact opposite path. The world increasingly views religion as an annoyance, and worship services as irritating disruptions. They tend to regard such gatherings as quaint throwbacks to a less enlightened era, and therefore worship services as more or less a waste of time. There is, after all, so much to do and only so much time to get it all done...

In a word, society regards all of this religion stuff as just so much foolishness.

Nothing much new here. Our text for this morning told us that God's one and only path to heaven has been dismissed as foolishness for the past 2000 years – longer even. Yet at all times, and especially during the season of Lent, we focus on this foolishness, for we resolve – along with the Apostle Paul in our text – to center our entire existence on the simple message of Christ crucified. We preach the cross, and we do so fully aware that **“the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.”**

Let's speak clearly and honestly here. Is the **“word (message) of the cross”** foolishness? As far as natural man is concerned, of course it is. Christians, on the other hand, see that cross as the message of forgiveness and eternal life. The world will never change its position on this – until Christ returns. They will always and only judge everything like **“the message of the cross”** according to the standard of their own intelligence and reason. With that as their only guide, the message of Jesus Christ crucified will always be foolishness.

But why stop there? For every one apparent inconsistency, contradiction, or “foolishness” that the world can identify, Christians could identify ten others. Why stop at the foolishness of the *cross*. What about the fact that we claim to have one God, but then speak of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – each of which are fully God? That is, at minimum, bad math. We also teach and believe that Jesus was fully God and fully human at the same time. That's bad physics. Jesus is in heaven, but he is also everywhere else. That's bad geography. So also Jesus is eternal (has no beginning and no end) and yet he was conceived and born 2000 years ago. That's bad chronometry. Jesus took part in the creation of all things, yet he was born of a virgin woman. God cannot die, yet on Good Friday Jesus (true God) died. God is merciful and forgiving, and yet God is perfectly just and therefore demands payment in full for every single sin.

How do we reconcile or explain such things? Is it because Christians are dumber, more ignorant, or more naïve than others in our society? To the world that's pretty much it. You and I have a different perspective. We believe such foolishness only because God the Holy Spirit has visited us with his divine wisdom; with an insight that far transcends man's wisdom. It is the Holy Spirit who worked a spectacular miracle in the heart of every single Christian. That miracle allows us to be at peace with divine truths that we cannot fully comprehend, let alone logically explain to others. It is God alone who has given us the ability to sit quietly at his feet and to learn divine truth from him. It is God who allows us to **“be still, and know that He is God.”** He taught us not only to *believe* such things, but to wholeheartedly embrace them and to be profoundly comforted by them.

How could we ever be comforted by that which we cannot fully comprehend or explain? Because God's Word teaches us that we have a God who is infinitely wiser, smarter, and more knowledgeable than we are. We are comforted in knowing that we have a God who comprehends what we cannot – not just the “big picture” but the *whole* picture of all human existence.

In fact how demoralizing to cling to a god that knows no more than we can know. How discouraging to have to rely on some “divine entity” that is limited to human capabilities. How disturbing to worship a god that comprehends no more than we can comprehend. *That* is the sort of wisdom and truth that natural man embraces. Our God has given us the privilege of knowing that which we could never know on our own. He has given us *divine wisdom*, and such sublime truths *often* exist beyond - and contradict – human reason.

We return to our text for this morning, where we read: **“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?**

Here we begin to grasp how important it is that we understand how God both defines and views “foolishness” and obviously then also “wisdom.” When God uses foolishness in this context, he is not referring to trivial matters of little real consequence. He is talking about the difference between hell and heaven. He is talking about the pinnacle of bad or worst.

In this the unbelieving world has unwittingly come to our aid. Where once, not that long ago, they only ventured tentatively onto the thin ice of the ridicule of God and the Christian faith, they have now become increasingly brazen in their ridicule and condemnation. Where once they only tapped on the ice with the testing foot, now they jump up and down with the full weight of their ridicule and condemnation. Where once they laughed in their sleeve, now they broadcast to the world their full, unrestrained derision and condemnation. This transition from guarded ridicule to open derision and scorn actually helps us. The subtle mockery of the past blurred the lines between faith and unbelief, between the children of man and the children of God. Their new-found boldness and open derision leave no doubt. Where once we might have foolishly imagined that we could be both “of the world” and Christian, they have now removed any foolish thought of compromise or alliance. Our only interaction can be to humbly and lovingly win them over by the power of God’s Word, boldly and uncompromisingly shared.

The world has clearly chosen foolishness. Our reaction? Give us God’s wisdom! Man’s “wisdom” (that which God regards as the ultimate foolishness) called for Jesus to abandon his mission and thereby to sentence all of humanity to eternal torment. In direct contradiction to the collected wisdom of the world, our Lord, our Savior, held unwaveringly to God’s wisdom, which was the path to the cross. Thank God that he did, for therein we find more than just wisdom. There we find forgiveness and life, for there Jesus paid what he did not owe for us, who owed what we could not pay – and therein we find true divine wisdom and eternal life. By grace, through faith, God credits Jesus’ perfection to each of us. God’s wisdom was to provide forgiveness to each of us through the life and death of his own Son. The foolishness of man is to base his hope for salvation on his own thoughts, his own wisdom, his own works or goodness. God views all of that as more than just “silly” or “unwise.” He knows it for exactly what it is – the guarantee of eternal damnation in hell.

Do not allow yourselves to be dragged down by the world’s relentless foolishness. Recognize it for exactly what it is and then run daily to the shelter of God’s Word, his divine wisdom. There you will find not only his perfect wisdom, but God’s comfort, strength, peace, and courage. We have no other refuge. And we need no other. Amen.

ESV **Exodus 20:1-17** And God spoke all these words, saying, ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷ "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. ⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ¹² "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³ "You shall not murder. ¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ "You shall not steal. ¹⁶ "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

ESV **John 2:23-25** Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

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The Third Sunday in Lent – March 3, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 421 *(Red Hymnal)*

"Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake"

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

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Exodus 20:1-17) God gave the Ten Commandments as a summary of the perfection he requires of every human being. Jesus alone kept them perfectly. Now those same Commandments serve as a perfect summary of God's will for Christians who want to thank him for the forgiveness that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is ours, and as we walk the path to heaven we seek to thank our God by our obedience to His holy will. How fitting then to be reminded of our God's will.

Psalm 8 (Supplement page 27) *(Brown Hymnal)*

The New Testament Lesson: (John 2:23-25) Having heard God's perfect summary of his holy will for our lives – the Ten Commandments – our second reading tells us that Jesus knew full well that man was simply incapable of such obedience. He came to earth knowing exactly what we were like – knowing **"what was in man."** The mystery of the gospel is, in part, how Jesus loved the unlovable with a holy, sacrificial love. He didn't come because he thought we were good; he came because he knew that we were bad. He knew that as corrupt, spiritually dead human beings, we didn't need a guide to show us the path by which we could rescue ourselves, we needed a Savior.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 153 *(Red Hymnal)*

"Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 *(Printed on the back of this bulletin)*

"Foolishness or Wisdom"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 535 *(Stanzas 1-5, 9) (Red Hymnal)*

"Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 47 *(Red Hymnal)*

"Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise"

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 churches and missions throughout the United States and 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 (38) Average (43) Wednesday (23)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Teacher Matthew Thurow has accepted the call to the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran High School and College. Pastor Michael Gurath is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Teacher Matthew Kranz is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Teacher Levi Schaller is considering calls to both Messiah of Hales Corners and Faith of Markesan.

Midweek Services – Our midweek Lenten services continue on Wednesday of this week.

Synod Nominations – Nominations are now open for synodical offices. For more information, please go to: <https://www.clclutheran.net/> and click on the "CLC Nominations" button.

Time Change – A reminder that next Saturday night/Sunday morning is the dreaded "spring ahead" time to turn our clocks ahead one hour for Daylight Savings Time.

CLC Youth Camp – is scheduled for June 9-15, 2024 on the Immanuel campus in Eau Claire. The camp is open to those entering grades 6-9 and the cost is \$140/camper. Registration will open **Saturday, March 16th at 10 AM CST**. For more information visit youthcampclc.wixsite.com/camp