

WISE FOOLISHNESS

January 22, 2023

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First Lesson; Micah 6:1-8

Psalm of the Day; Psalm 37

Gospel Lesson; Matthew 5:1-12

Sermon Text; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

This is our reading from 1 Corinthians, chapter one, verses twenty-six through thirty-one.

For example, consider your call, brothers. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view, not many were powerful, and not many were born with high status. But God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are strong, and God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with the things that are, so that no one may boast before God. But because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. God did this so that, just as it is written, “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

These are your words, Heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

I don't know how it is with you kids, in your neighborhood. When I was a kid, growing up in my neighborhood, there were a bunch of

boys who were all about my age. There were ten to fifteen of us who would get together almost every day in the summertime, in a little park near our house. In the summertime, it was big athletic time. We would either play baseball, or we would play football. There were no parents there, it was just a bunch of kids who would show up, and we would play pick up baseball, or pick up football. So, generally what would happen is the two best athletes would be the captains. That happened every time. One of them was named Bobby, and the other one was named Dan.

These two, best athletes would then pick. They would go, one after the next, and pick who was going to be on their team. I happened to be the smallest, scrawniest, and probably the least coordinated of the whole crew. It was pretty merciless, and almost every time I was the last one chosen.

I had a bigger, older brother Tim. And, to differentiate between Tim and me, they would call me Little Bart. And so, at the final end, somebody would say, "*Ok Little Bart, you are on my team.*" I was the last one picked. Once in awhile it would even go this way, "*You can have little Bart on your team.*" It was always that way, and I understood where I stood in the pecking order.

One day, same thing happened. Everybody showed up at the park, and we were going to play baseball. Bobby was the first to pick, and he said, "*I pick Little Bart.*"

Everybody looked at him. And, I looked at him. Again, he said, "*Yeah, I pick Little Bart. I want him to be on my team.*"

I had never heard that before. I had always been picked, because they had to pick me. They did not have any choice. But, this was different. I knew it was total grace, total mercy, but he wanted me on his team!

In a way, that is a picture of what God has done for us in Christ. Now, imagine we are picking teams. Imagine, (and we would never, ever, ever, ever do this), but imagine here at Holy Cross there are

two pastors. And the two of us pastors say, *“Let's divide the congregation up into teams. You pick first, and then I pick, and then you pick, and we will divide the whole congregation up into teams.”* Can you imagine how that picking order would go? Probably there would be thoughts about, *“Well, which of these people come to church every Sunday?” “Which ones are good leaders?” “Which ones are friendly people?” “Which ones are good on boards and committees?” “Which ones are good givers?”*

Can you imagine what would happen? And where would you fall? Where do you think you would fall in to that picking order, if we divided the congregation up that way?

I am going to tell you something. If we did that, that would be one of the most divisive things we could ever do. But, that is what was going on in the city of Corinth, where our text takes place. There were huge divisions happening in that congregation. People were trying to figure out, *“Where do I fit, in the 'pecking order'?”*

Some people were saying, *“I follow this pastor.”* And others were saying, *“I follow that pastor.”* And others were saying, *“I follow this other pastor.”*

Everybody was trying to figure out, *“How important am I?” “What is my status in the congregation?”*

It was divisive, and it was dividing the congregation. And so Paul, then in this letter, does something wonderful, where he really gets an entire congregation to look at, *“What is status, and where does our status come from?”*

One thing to realize is this. It is the same in our day. If you start to look at your own, personal, status in the world, and in society, how do we usually do that? I will tell you how they did it back in the days of Corinth, when Paul was writing to the Corinthian congregation. This is Greek culture. It is very similar to The United States culture.

-One of the ways they decided whether somebody was of high status

had to do with brains. If you studied Philosophy, you would discover that this whole clump of some of the most famous Philosophers who have ever lived, lived in this little area around Corinth, this area called Greece, right around the time The New Testament was written. These people were so influential that still today they influence the thought of Western Culture. These were people like Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Pythagoreus – names like that. In that culture, *“If you are smart, if you are wise, you are considered really, really important.”* That was their culture. Ours is not all that much different. You know, if you have a master's degree, or a PhD, or an MD, you are probably considered in society of having a higher standard.

-Another thing they really cherished in Corinth was physical strength. It was in this area of the world, the area of Greece and Corinth, where the Olympics were developed. The Olympics was all about, *“Who is the fastest? Who is the strongest?”* The faster and stronger someone was, the more they were valued. So, strength was really held in high esteem.

It is no different here in the United States. Who are the people who get paid millions, and millions of dollars every year in their contract? It is sports people. We esteem them very highly.

-Then another status symbol was, *“Were you born into a family that is of high status?”* The higher status family you were born into, in this area of Corinth, probably the more highly you were esteemed. That is not all that much different today, is it? If you are born into a family of high status, you probably have more opportunity than the typical person.

So Paul, knowing this congregation was divided over, *“Which of us is the most important. Where do we stand in this 'pecking order'?”* Paul says this. *“Consider what you were, when you were called. Not many of you were wise. Not many of you were strong. Not many of you were born of high status. In fact, God chose the foolish*

things, the weak things, the low things, the despised things, the things that are not.”

So Paul says, *“Look at yourself in the congregation, and think about really who makes up the congregation?”*

As far as we know from scripture, there were not many prominent people at all in the congregation in Corinth. The only guy we know for sure who was prominent in society was a guy by the name of Erastus, who happened to be the city treasurer. And, we know there were probably a lot of people who had been slaves that were in that congregation.

In fact, I want you to listen to something that was written by a secular, non-Christian historian who lived right at the time the book of Corinthians was written. So, he was not a believer. But, just like today, you can look at Christian congregations, he wrote about his impression of who made up Christian congregations in the days when Paul is writing this.

“I can tell at a glance, as I look at the membership of Christian congregations that they are able to convince only the foolish, the dishonorable, the stupid, and only slaves, women, and children.”

That is apparently the basic makeup of what the Christian congregations were. In fact, in our scripture reading God says, *(I want you to think about this.)*

**“But God chose, (He chose) the foolish things of the world...
the weak things of the world...
the lowly things of the world
and the despised things,
and the things that are not...”**

Just pause for a second, and think about when it says, “...God chose the foolish things...” All of you know a little Greek, whether you realize it, or not. The word for *'foolish'*, the Greek word for *'foolish'*, is the word *'moron'*. It says God chose the *'moron'* of this world. Now, you and I know the word *'moron'* is a socially unacceptable

word. If you call someone a 'moron' you are saying, "*You have no intelligence, whatsoever*". You are saying, "*You make some of the stupidest decisions that anybody can ever make*". This passage says "**...God chose (well, in Greek) the 'moron' of the world...**"

For example, do you remember when Jesus was hanging on the cross, and there was a guy who was hanging next to Him? He was a thief. You had to make some pretty, pretty, **pretty poor choices** to end up on a cross, on a Roman cross, being crucified to death. I bet there were a lot of people who looked up at that thief, next to Jesus, who looked up at that guy, and said in their heart, "*What a moron*". Especially, when he then started mocking Jesus. Here is this guy dying, and he is making such a poor choice. He is mocking Jesus, and people probably thought in their hearts, "*That guy is a moron*". But, God chose him. God chose that man, and that man came to repentance and faith. He heard Jesus say to him,

"Today you will be with me in paradise."

The Bible says,

"God chose the 'morons' of this world...

God chose the foolish things...

the weak things...

the lowly things...

the things that are not..."

-God chose people like Peter, who was just a common fisherman. He did not have any huge degree, or education to be a leader in The Church.

-God chose somebody like Matthew, who was a tax collector, a despised tax collector to be one of His twelve disciples. God chose the despised things of this world.

-God chose the woman who was caught in adultery, who He forgave, and to be an example for centuries to people of the forgiveness of Christ. God chose the base things of this world.

-God chose little babies to come to faith. The things that are not.

They are nobodies in the world, but He chooses them to come to faith in Christ.

And so here it says God chose all of these weak, lowly, powerless things.

Now, there is a lady who once said this. *“Thank God I am saved by the letter 'm'.”* Here is what she meant. This lady lived in England about one hundred years ago. She was known as Lady Hamilton. Lady Hamilton was born into nobility. She had a pretty prominent position. She was pretty wealthy. She was pretty powerful. And, she was a Christian. She believed in Jesus, as her Savior. She read this passage that said, “Not many of you were wise. Not many of you were strong. Not many of you were of noble birth.”

She said, *“Thank God, thank God it does not say, 'Not **any** of you were wise. Not **any** of you were strong. Not **any** of you were of noble birth. It says not **many**. So, I am saved by the letter 'm'.”*

It is not just the foolish people God chooses. But why is that's the predominance of who ends up in the Christian Church? God in, our scripture reading today, says why. It says God chose these weak, lowly, foolish things to shame the strong, the wise. To bring to naught the things that are, so that no one, no one can boast before the Lord. Nobody.

Here is the point. God wants us all to be fully aware, *“I am not a Christian, because there is something special in me.”* If you are weak, powerless, lowly, and common, and you have made bad choices, you are not in The Church, because of who you are. It is God's mercy. It is God's mercy that you are part of The Holy Christian Church. And, it is the same if you are powerful, wise, and strong. It is not who you are that makes you a member of God's people. It is mercy that has brought you here.

You know, on The Last Day, or on the day somebody dies, the most brilliant scientist in the world, with all of his or her brilliance, when he or she stands before God, is brilliance going to save them? All of

the brilliance in that scientist's brain could fit in the tip of God's little finger. He is the God who created the universe. That person's brilliance is not going to mean a thing.

Or, the greatest football player in the world, the greatest NFL player, some day when he dies, is God going to ask him, *“Tell me how many passes you completed?” “How many touchdowns did you make?” “How many people did you tackle?” “How many Super Bowls did you win?”* That will not matter one bit. It is not that man's strength that is going to save him.

Or a movie star. God is not going to ask, *“How many fans did you have?” “How many people followed your blog page?” “How many people went to your movies?”* He is not going to ask that. Those things won't mean anything.

The one thing that is going to matter, the one thing that is going to matter is where you stood spiritually with God. That is all that will matter. If God were to look at each one of us, do you know what The Bible says? There is no difference. There is no difference.

**“All have sinned
and all fall short of the glory of God.”**

There is no difference between any of us. There, our scripture says,

**“But because of Him (not you)
you are in Christ Jesus,
who became for us (now listen to this)
who became for us the wisdom of God...”**

Now it is going to explain what true wisdom is.

**“...namely, our righteousness
our sanctification
and redemption.”**

That is the true wisdom of God. It is only God's mercy. It is only God's mercy, no matter who you are, that you know that.

There is a pretty well known pastor who died about two weeks ago. He was this kind of loving, wise, gentle, old pastor. He was a pastor

out in South Dakota. I had heard he had died, so I was watching one of his old speeches he had given. He was talking about how he was pastor for this congregation in a little town, out in South Dakota. There was a woman in the congregation who was married to a guy who was not a part of the congregation. This man she was married to was a scoffer. He laughed at Christianity, and thought Christianity was stupid, and for weak people, powerless people. Nobody really liked this wife's husband, who was not a member of the congregation. And, the pastor did not really like him that much, either.

One day this woman came to her pastor, and said, "*Pastor, you know my husband*".

He said, "*Yeah, I do*".

She said, "*Well, he has cancer, and he is dying. Will you please, will you please, please, please go talk to him?*"

The pastor thought in his mind, "*I don't want to do that, but now I have been called. I have been sent. I have been called, and that is my job, so now I need to go, and talk to him.*"

He knocked on this guy's door, went in the house, and told the man, "*I have been sent by the Lord to talk to you.*"

Then, he told the man about Jesus. He told him, "*You know, Jesus died for your sins. You are forgiven, because of what Christ did. He purchased you at a great price. Everything you have ever done, it is all forgiven.*"

The man just listened, and kind of scoffed.

Before he left, he asked, "*Can I come back tomorrow?*"

The guy said, "*I suppose*".

So, he came back day, after day, after day. And, that man listened day, after day, after day, until one day he confessed his faith in Jesus.

One day, the pastor got a call from that man's wife. This man's wife said, "*Pastor, you better get over here. He is dying.*"

So, the pastor went to that house, as quickly as he could. Here was this guy in his bed. He was nothing but skin and bones. He was dying, and he had just become a Christian.

The pastor reached out, picked him up in his arms, and held this man. They were face to face, when he looked at him, and said, “*I want to ask you something. Do you believe in Jesus?*”

The man said, “*Yes*”.

The pastor said, “*The next voice you hear, the next voice you hear” (because this man was literally dying) with these ears is going to be the voice of Jesus speaking to your grave saying, 'Get up'. You are going to get up, and your body is going to be changed to be like Christ's glorious body.*”

The man looked at the pastor, and said, “*YES!*” And then, he died.

-You can't get that kind of righteousness anywhere in this world, except in Christ. Christ has become our wisdom. **That is our righteousness.**

-**He has become our sanctification.** You can't get sanctification (that is the ability to live a life that tries to please Christ, anywhere else than the Gospel.) He is our wisdom. You can't get that anywhere else.

-**He is our redemption.** He is our redemption.

I love it, even when a little, three-year old child at nighttime folds their hands, and says,

*“Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.”*

You see, you can't get that wisdom anywhere else in the world, other than Christ. You know, I have been redeemed. I have been redeemed and belong to Jesus, I am safe. I am safe, no matter what happens.

So, our scripture says none of us have anything to boast about,

except Christ.

**“Let the one who boasts
boast in the Lord.”**

Amen

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding keep
our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus our Lord

Amen