

Sermon 3-4-2018
Third Sunday in Lent
By
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The world looks at us like we're idiots. From the earliest days, Christians have been seen as backwards, going against the grain of the world, which the world sees as perfectly fine. Early Christians of the Roman Empire believed Christians to be atheists, because Christians did not believe in the Roman gods. They also believed them to be cannibals, because of that whole "eat my body and drink my blood" thing. Christians were also considered to be anti-humanist, because of their rejecting of Roman society. Throughout time, and throughout the world, Christians have been considered as people to laugh at, or mock, or reject, or outright kill. Even in America, a supposedly Christian nation, there are those who mock Christians as sheep or weak-minded, and our public dimensions of faith are ignored or fought against.

Common worldly wisdom in those situations is to retreat, especially into your own enclaves, where you can pray and proclaim as you see fit. But that is worldly wisdom. And it leads to the faith being just as much a part of the world as anti-faith. Faith becomes a gate-keeping, a way to say "we're smart and you're not". But isn't that just claiming your own wisdom anyway? In our reading from 1 Corinthians today, Paul declares that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world. So, when we borrow the wisdom of the world to make the Gospel look better or more easily digestible, we actually lose the Gospel. In verse 22, Paul outlines what we do: "Jews demand signs, and Greeks look for wisdom." OK, you guys want signs? We'll put up actual signs along the side of the road, and we'll create faux miracles for you, so that you believe what we're saying. OK, you guys are looking for wisdom? This is more like intelligence, right? So we're going to throw every theological word in that we can, and some of those more amazing things we're just going to try to explain away.

But the declaration of God has nothing to do with signs or intelligence. It has to do with Jesus Christ, himself and alone, crucified for your sins and raised for your justification. It may have been a sign, sure, but not one we saw with our eyes. And God dying for his people? Doesn't seem to make much sense to me. But it makes all the difference. Christ dying on the cross and being raised from the dead is the declaration of God's power, and his wisdom, which is higher than anything we could ever ask or imagine. And he shows this by going after those who are not in places like *this*. Ultimately, the power and wisdom of the world want to be in locations like this. Swanky parties, fine food and wine, hobnobbing with influential people. We can even have our own versions of this, our exclusive clubs that we get to set the rules at. But that's the wisdom of the world.

The wisdom of Christ is far better. Those who are not influential, those who don't have the money, those who don't have the right bona fides, those are the ones that God uses to declare his wonder, his glory, and his work. One of the best theologians I know was a pig farmer for many years. He's now a pastor, with all the education and everything. My favorite story, though, is a friend of mine, who I met through the wilds of the internet. He's a husband and a dad, a truck driver in Michigan. Every day he goes to work, driving all over the region, delivering whatever they put in his trailer. Cusses sometimes, as truck drivers often do. If you were looking for influence, or societally acceptable professions, he's probably not the guy you're going to. But he has influenced my faith immensely. He has this ability to see right down to the heart of theological matters, and make them practical for those who are in situations much like his. God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong, and he is still choosing those from the small places, the ignored places, the rejected places of the world, to show his power and to declare his immense glory.

So, what does this mean for us? It means that you, for all your chasing after power and influence, for all your retreating from the world, for all your trying to give signs and wisdom, you are still one of those lowly things. This should make us humble. We should realize that anything that is done in this world for the sake of the kingdom is not done by us, because we're lowly, poor, miserable sinners. And yet, good is done in the world and Christ is preached through us, because God decides to do it that way. In fact, God is just doing what he has done since Genesis chapter 1: creating out of nothing. Out of absolutely nothing, God creates his hope and his glory into this world, and places it in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. And your lowly self becomes his mouthpiece, his worker, his proclaimer. It makes us look like fools. It makes us look like those who don't care about influence. But that is what we are: fools for Christ, and outsourcing our influence to the one who really changes hearts. AMEN.