

## ***Simply Confounding***

Text: 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

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**I want us to hold a thought in our hearts today.** It's an odd one, really; counter intuitive; mildly confusing; a bit upside-down; and, quite frankly, something that's simply confounding.

Even so. It reminds us that God's realm asks us to see and live not by the standards of the world, such as they are: wealth and power, appearance and position; rather by the calculus of heaven which is formed around values more like love and acceptance, mercy and hope.

In fact, you may recall, last Sunday we sang a hymn in which we wrapped these words around the kingdom of God: "The poor are rich, the weak are strong, the foolish ones are wise. Tell all who mourn, outcasts belong, who perishes will rise." It should give us pause to wonder what these peculiar phrases are about!

**Paul put this just a tad differently but was getting at the same thing.** He said that to strive to be Christian . . . (strive because we are always on the way in becoming fully Christian, but never rock-solid there) . . . we need to think and feel, believe and behave aside from the accustomed measures of the world.

So he wrote to the church on the corner of Farmington Avenue and South Main Street in Corinth. I hope you notice the clever address I've created! It's our corner, Farmington Avenue and South Main; placed in his world, so that we might also receive his truth back here at home.

"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Who is wise among you? For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." And later in that same letter, "We are to be fools for Christ."

**So imagine such paradoxical notions on a typical summer day at Silver Lake Conference Center.** Molly was the Dean for the week; I have in mind and she posted the theme as being "Nerds for Jesus."<sup>1</sup> It's not your usual church camp theme!

Yikes! Had Molly gone too far? Simply using the name Jesus and nerd in the same sentence pushes the edges for me! And for six days no less, and with a gaggle of middle school kids who probably wondered no small amount about their own nerdiness.

But right up front she told the kids that the real definition of nerd is not about what we wear or the style of our hair. It's not a synonym for geek. It's "someone who gets pretty excited and focused about certain things and has a deep passion for something very particular in life."

So by such definition, Molly instructed, "Jesus was something of a nerd, even perhaps the Greatest of Nerds, because he was extravagantly passionate about lots of different things: things like love and justice, nature and healing and prayer and peace and hope."

He went against the grain of the day, breaking many of the accustomed norms; like befriending the marginalized and outcast; or stopping to hear one voice, one person, in the midst of a crowd; or dining with ne're-do-wells; or forgiving even sinners.

Molly even went so far as to say that we are all supposed to be a little bit nerdy like Jesus! O my goodness!

**One more step with all of this simply confounding, topsy-turvy stuff.** Because sometimes large thoughts are understood best in the flesh and bones of real life. So let's shift our thoughts to a woman whose foolishness for Christ made her a champion for God.

Agnus was born in Albania where her name meant "little flower" - though no one knew the blossom that would become of her - not in their wildest dreams. As she came of age life led her from Albania, first to Ireland and then to India where her name soon changed to Mother Teresa. These are words that guided her extravagant compassion every day. They hung on the wall of the mission that she founded.

*People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered.  
Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.  
Be kind anyway.*

*If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you.  
Be honest and sincere anyway.*

*What you spend years creating others could destroy overnight.  
Create anyway.*

*If you find security and happiness, some may be jealous.  
Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today will often be forgotten.  
Do good anyway.*

*Give the best you have even if it is never enough.  
Give your best anyway.*

*In the final analysis it's between you and God.  
It was never between you and them anyway.*

**Wherever any of this intersects your life today pay careful attention.** I will do the same. And if it's simply confounding, as following Jesus can be at times, let's pay attention to that as well. It is Lent after all and truly following Jesus has never been an easy road.

Still and even more: let's carry such thoughts to the Table where in symbols as unpretentious and unimpressive and common as bread and cup, wheat and grape, we receive again the amazing saving grace of God.

I'll tell you, on that measure, I'd be a fool for Christ any day! Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Molly Finney Baskette. "Nerds for Jesus", The Still Speakers Writers, 2017.