

1 Corinthians 1:26-31    4th Sunday after Epiphany    Jan 31, 1993

*26Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

In the year 53 AD a list of the 100 most influential people would not have included his name. A list of the 1000 most important citizens of Rome would have found his name absent. In a listing of 100,000 people who make a difference in society, still we would search in vain for his name, I suspect.

But of all the things written between 50 and 60 AD his letters have been the most studied, the most discussed, the most influential. Letters written by an insignificant man, addressed to tiny gatherings of common people in places far from the centers of power have shaped more lives than all the edicts of all the Caesars.

Paul was his name. He would be as forgotten today as he was in his own time except for one thing: God chose to speak through him.

This morning millions of people have sat in silence as a small portion of his letter to the Corinthians has been read. Rich people and poor people, Hispanics, and African Americans and Caucasians and people of Asian descent, women and men have opened their ears to hear what God will speak to them through a letter written one thousand nine hundred and forty years ago.

*Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 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; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.*

Imagine how warmly these words were greeted as they were first read as the Corinthian Christians gathered.

Who does he think he is to talk to us like that - calling us foolish and weak and low and despised? We are residents of Corinth. Our city is one of the most important cities of the world.

Paul calls us foolish? Nothing?

A nobody writing to nobodies - Paul writing to the Corinthians.

Or try it on today: A nobody, me, preaching to nobodies, you. How does that feel? If we could see ourselves as the world sees us that is exactly the truth. Even in Avon Lake we do not count for much. In Lorain County we are just a speck. In Northeast Ohio, almost no one knows we are here. In the world we are nothing.

I don't like the sound of that. I want to be somebody - a name - some fame - a face.

We want to be somebody, not a forgotten people, unnoticed people.

But through Paul the God who has created all points us in a different direction - not toward fame and a name, but toward Christ.

*God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

Give me a name and fame and you'll find I am boasting of me. I'll be useless to you and useless to God.

But give us faith in Jesus Christ. Let him be our name, he our fame, he our glory and God can change hearts through us.

*God chose what is foolish to shame the wise; God chose what is weak to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not to reduce to nothing things that are that no one might boast in the presence of God.*

Jesus Christ dying on the cross, weak and low and despised, nothing, no one. Mocked and spit upon - more abused than those ninety year olds beaten with a bat - lower than a woman being raped - naked there on the cross, unable to even cover himself with his hands - crying out in thirst, given vinegar to drink. Then dead – nothing - existing in this world no more.

And what does God do with this one? Not only does God give him life, but God says, "This is I. This is I from the manger, through the teaching and healing and eating and drinking. This is I, in the weakness, and the lowliness and the being despised." In all that has been from beginning to the end, if a human is to see God as God is, here in the dying of Jesus the vision is given - God, giving God's self in love - nothing held back until there is nothing left.

And now God has called a few hundred people to do it all over again. God has called us to pour out our lives in love. Nobodies in the eyes of the world, we are called daughters and

sons of the almighty God. Nothing to boast of in ourselves, yet in Christ we claim the goodness of God.

What could God make of the nothing that we are? Judging by what happened through Paul and the Corinthians we would have to say, "Who can even imagine?" Could God take of our faith and our service and change the world more profoundly that all the shakers and movers of this world will change it? Could what we do in service of Christ be so blessed by God that the world would be changed? Who knows?

Jesus and Paul walked in faith. God did all the rest. Even when dying is all that Jesus could do God was saving the world.

God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.