

## The Foolishness of God

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...**

One of the great Church mystics, Julian of Norwich, was once quoted as saying, *“Only God can turn our weaknesses into our strengths”*...

Pastor and preacher, Charles Stanley, once said, *“God often showcases His power – on the stage of human weakness”*...

And in our reading this morning from 1 Corinthians 1:18 – St. Paul writes, *“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those of us who are being saved - it is the power of God”*...

I don't know if you've ever noticed this – but there's a repeating theme in the biblical stories – where God takes the least likely people, places, and things (and always uses them to do amazing works of power and glory)...

For example – when the people of Israel were looking for a king (God sends them David – who was a quiet, young shepherd boy with no experience in the real world)... and yet somehow God transforms David into one of the greatest leaders the world has ever known... (and again, not perfect – but able to do amazing things)...

Moses had a speech impediment – but even still – God uses him to lead the Children of Israel out of slavery (and into the Promised Land)...

Before St. Paul knew the Lord – the Bible tells us that he was actively trying to arrest, beat, and even kill Christian believers... but when God decided to use Paul's life for good (not only did Paul play a huge part in spreading the Gospel throughout the Ancient world) he continues still to be viewed by many as the most influential Christian thinker of all time...

And let's not forget the life of our Lord – who, himself, grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, never wielded any power or special title while he was on this earth, was rejected by most, was convicted of crimes he never committed, crucified on a cross, and killed – and yet again, God was able to take what appeared to be weakness, defeat, and death (and instead use it as the *source of our salvation*)...

Which is why St. Paul also writes these words in 2 Corinthians 12:9, *“For thus says the Lord, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness!”*”...

In other words, God can take what appears to be hopeless (and He brings forth new hope)... He takes what appears to be defeat (and brings forth unexpected victories)... and even when all seems lost – like some have been led to believe today - (God can still use our darkest hour - to bring forth new life and new dreams)... Why?... because our God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow...

You know, this week I was remembering a true story about a young boy named Louis (who lived in France in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century)... and according to what I've read Louis was born blind in his left eye (which caused him all sorts of challenges in his day – and made life difficult at times)...

But his father, who was a harness-maker and also a devout Christian, would always tell his son the same thing, “*Don't let your weakness prevent you from seeing what God can do*”...

Well, young Louis loved and admired his father – and wanted to become a harness-maker as well... and one day, when Louis was only 9 years old his father felt it was an appropriate time to start teaching the young boy about the trade... and so he gave to Louis a hole-puncher and a hammer – and drew a simple pattern on a piece of leather so that he could start learning the basics of design...

and as the father handed him the tools he said, “*Son, just be careful that you don't hit your hand*”... but in a moment of great excitement Louis did just that... he accidentally hit his hand with the hole puncher - it flew up - pierced his good eye (and he was now completely blind)...

Well, to keep a long story short there was a period of time for that family when all seemed lost – all seemed bleak - and all this talk about ‘*God turning weakness into a strength*’ seemed like nothing more than wishful thinking (at least to the young boy who found himself wandering in darkness)... but even still Louis' father insisted that God could turn his weakness into his strength (if he would just keep his heart open to what God could do)...

and from what I've read – years later when Louis was in the family garden he picked up a small pine cone and after feeling a few bumps on the cone he felt a rush of inspiration (which he would later describe as being the *Spirit of God*) directing him to create an alphabet of raised dots on paper so that the blind could feel and interpret what was written... and because God continues still – even today – to take what appears to be weakness and use it for good (through Louis Braille –

a boy *who's life* would have seemed hopeless to many – God was able to open up a whole new world *for the blind*)...

And friends, there are many stories like that one (of God using the weak to do great things) – whether it be the story of AA (where God used a washed up alcoholic to bring a message of recovery to millions of people around the world struggling with addiction)...

Or how people in India had struggled for independence from the British for decades (and instead of raising up warriors or using bullets - God used a frail, tiny man named Gandhi as a vessel to the people's freedom)...

And even when I think about my own calling as a minister (I was definitely the least likely candidate to do God's work simply because I've always had a phobia of public speaking – and I'm not saying that I'll ever win the 'Preacher of the Year' Award) but what amazes me personally is how God has used me through the years to preach the Gospel to numerous people that I've met along the way... in fact, even today I find the whole thing sort of strange...

But that's just it – we worship a strange God... a God who doesn't follow the rules of the world (but brings forth new life from where there was no life – new dreams where the old ones were once shattered – a new hope in place of old scars – blessings that come in unexpected packages)...

And I love what St. Paul tries to get us to think about (further on) in our reading this morning from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:25... even he concludes that, "*For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength*"...

In other words, don't rely on what people tell you – and don't limit yourself to what you think you can't do – no, as a person of faith (you're also invited to look to God to even better future) and to do impossible things... why?... because (the Bible tells us) that's the nature of the God that we worship... who takes what appears to be small, and insignificant, and weak, and impossible (and again and again – God transforms it – He changes it – and He brings forth unexpected blessings (in unexpected ways))... in fact, that's the message of the cross... God using a symbol of death to bring forth new life...

Listen, I don't know where you are in your faith in these difficult days (or how you view yourself) or even what you believe about God's power (or what He can do)...

But let me remind you again and again that the season of Lent is the perfect time to bring your struggles to God, to empty yourself of doubts and worries and fear – and instead – open your heart up to what God can do... and allow yourself to `imagine once again - and to trust Him (like you've never trusted Him before) and to keep coming back to God expecting (*that with God all things are still possible*)... because as St. Paul writes in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:17, “*if any man or woman be in Christ, they are a new creature: old things are passed away; and all things will become new*” ...

Let me close with something very short about a little girl (who understands this message well)... and the way the story is told this little girl was always proudly wearing a shiny, gold cross on a chain around her neck... it was obvious to everyone who saw her wearing it (that it meant something special to her)...

Well, one day she was approached by a man who said to her, “*Little girl, I don't know much about your religion – but I can tell you one thing – the cross that Jesus died on wasn't anything near as beautiful as the one you're wearing... in fact, it was an old, wooden thing... and what's worse – it was a symbol of death*” ...

And I love what the little girl says in response – she says, “*I know that – but I also know that whatever Jesus touches – He also changes*” ...

And friends, my hope this morning (is that if you've come here depressed, or feeling defeated, or even believing that your life is too insignificant to matter) my hope is that you'll let Jesus touch your own heart – so that it too can be changed to believe in what God can do (with what you have)...

And yes, even today, “*The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*” ...

May the Lord use us all as instruments of His love... May we all be willing to trust in the goodness of our God... and May we all come to see that with God all things are possible...

In Jesus' name we pray!

**Amen.**