

“When others revile you” 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly 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, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Would you like to discuss some of our problems? Yes? No? Doesn't matter whether we want it or not, we have to deal with them. We are dealing with them whether we are conscious of it or not. At least, let's be conscious about them.

Let's discuss two of our problems and a solution that today's reading offers. The first problem. We look like fools. We look like fools and losers. Yes, we do. This is exactly how the Church of Christ looks in the eyes of the world.

It was so back then, when Paul wrote his letter to Corinthians, it is so now and it will always be that way. Till the end of this age. Foolish and weak people. Ignorant and of a low status. Backward people, out of step with times, unloving, judging people.

This is how the world sees us. That is how the Biblical message appears to the world, to those outside. And of course, how else could they see us? For these Christians believe that it was God who created the world in six days. Obviously, they hate science.

They also believe in talking snakes and eating forbidden fruit. How naïve! They also worship a Jewish man who was executed by Romans, crucified naked 2000 years ago as their God. What a god! And they have many weird ideas about this world.

For example, they believe that sexual intimacy is only for married people and that only two people of the opposite sex can get married. It seems they still live in the Middle Ages, and they obviously hate gay people.

They believe that men and women are different and, perhaps, shouldn't be doing the same things, especially when it comes to certain unique Church callings, like being a pastor. They obviously hate women.

They believe that their God created only male and female, and that everyone needs to conform to those two categories, as if we couldn't choose ourselves who we want to be. They obviously hate trans-people.

How could the world describe such a community? Aren't they foolish? Aren't they out of touch with times? Sure, they are. This is how the world sees us. How do you feel about it? How do you like being seen as unloving fools?

I don't know what you would answer. But I suspect that the majority of Christians are not too fond about being seen that way. I can tell you that I don't like when someone thinks that way about me. Not a big fan of being perceived as a fool and hater.

But that's our reality. This is how the world sees Christians. But then hear what Jesus says to you: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Mt 5:12)

Rejoice and be glad, for you are in a great company of God's saints. If only we did that... Too often we do not respond with joy, and this is where we get to **the second problem, which is much more serious**, much more dangerous, much more harmful and with a huge potential to destroy our churches and our faith.

Being seen as fools by the world, even being hated for the sake of Jesus by the world or even by our family members, that's nothing surprising, that is a part and parcel of being a Christian. That is our job description when we choose to follow Jesus.

If you were promised something else, like health and wealth and fame and glory, sorry, someone has lied to you. But the second problem is about how we choose to respond to how the world looks at us. And this is where it gets really challenging.

You see, we don't want to be seen as fools, we don't want to be seen as unloving and backwards. We want to be seen as nice people, we want to be accepted, we want to be praised, we want to be recognized that we too fit in, that we too are good enough.

Unless we have some deep problem with society, we all long for those things. And that's where the temptation for worldly glory and recognition puts our faithfulness to Jesus in danger. Who do we want to please more, our God or our unbelieving neighbours?

Who do we fear to upset more, God our Father, or our society that has a little time for people like us? It will differ from person to person, but there are certain trends that we can see happening in churches across the Western world.

More and more churches want to go with the times and instead of trusting the Word of God to guide and shape their lives, they choose different authorities, those that are trendy in the world.

More and more churches are keen to subscribe to the theory of evolution, even as there is more and more purely scientific evidence pointing to an Intelligent Designer behind the Universe and the miracle of life.

More and more churches are keen to abandon the Biblical teaching on sin, not to offend anyone, instead blaming everyone else, except ourselves. Even as the reality of our sinfulness, our selfishness, our rebellious hostility to God, our foolish ignorance and arrogance steers in our face.

More and more churches are ashamed of the cross of Christ. We are happy to talk about Christian values and Christian ethos – whatever they are – but not much interested in calling to repentance and proclaiming God's forgiveness.

More and more churches are happy to embrace what our society teaches about sexual ethics and relationships – for the sake of love of course, love always wins – even as our society screams in pain from self-inflicted broken relationships, divorce, fatherlessness, violence, and so on and on and on...

More and more churches are happy to embrace secular anti-family, anti-marriage and anti-Christian ideologies fighting for justice and equality in the Church, as we see it happening with our own three decades long ordination drama, closing eyes to the alarming evidence from around the world and here at home in Australia.

We can see what happens when a church steps on that road. The authority of the Bible is abandoned, the Gospel of repentance and forgiveness is exchanged to the gospel of inclusivity, every sin is tolerated and those who still want to hold to the truth of the Scripture are silenced and marginalized. For the sake of love and mission, of course.

Why do Christians do all of this? Why is this happening in the LCA? Because, we fear and love and trust the world more than we fear and love and trust the Triune God. This is our problem. We want to please the world. We want to be accepted and to fit in.

But as Jesus said, you can't serve two masters. You will love one and you will hate the other. Once we choose to love the world more than our Lord Jesus Christ, we will reject His message, His instructions, and will want to embrace what's popular in the world.

This is where we are now. For the fifth time the LCA synod will try to change the Biblical teaching on the office of pastors; to please the world, giving in to those who demand that the Church becomes just like the world. What a joke!

We cannot pretend this is not happening. The evil one won't stop deceiving if we pretend that we don't see his doings. I wrote a letter to our Bishops; you can pick a copy at the back of the Church. Do you know how they responded? As usual. Nothing. Silence. Thus, our attempts to please the world and to fit in continues. This is our real problem.

Is there a solution? Of course, there is. Of course! Paul the apostle reminds us about it. For **“you, dear brothers and sisters, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”**

See, temporary acceptance and glory of this world come with a hidden price-tag. The Ruler of this age doesn't wish to bless his own, he rejoices in deceiving and leading them into death and eternal destruction. He promises, but never delivers what we long for. He feasts on those Christians who bow down before him waiting for his approval.

But then comes the message of the cross. Our gracious God wants everyone to hear it, regardless of how hostile to Him we may be. Our God knows that we are weak, that we want to feel accepted and appreciated, He knows how the world tempts us, He knows how many times we have and will let Him down, He knows us better than we do.

On the cross He reveals how much He values you, how much He is ready to do for you, how committed He is to us, even when we turn away from Him. He gives to every thirsty soul what the world can never give – unconditional love and total acceptance.

He invites and embraces you in the most wonderful fellowship with Himself and with all His saints, even as we keep failing Him. The message of the cross is not just a nice account about what God did for you. That message is the power and wisdom of God.

When we were still friends of the world and His enemies, Jesus went to the cross for us. **Christ is your redemption.** The message of the cross doesn't just inform us about what God did in Jesus, it does free you from the power of sin and the devil and death. Jesus has purchased you with His own blood, and now you are His own.

Christ is your sanctification. The message of the cross doesn't just show how much our God loves you, that message comes on the wings of the Spirit, and the Spirit of God makes home in you, creates in you a new heart, and daily remakes you more like Jesus.

Christ is your righteousness. The message of the cross doesn't just instruct you for your new life, it restores you, it changes your priorities and allegiances, it places you in the right relationships with our God and with our neighbours.

Christ is your wisdom. God's message in the Bible doesn't simply retell the history of God's salvation, it actually reveals God's good and wise design for our lives, it makes even the simple wise, it equips you with the divine wisdom and understanding.

When the world pressures us, instead of trying to change Biblical message and to remove those parts that the world doesn't like, we should joyfully dive deeper in the living waters of God's Word.

We should be learning and joyfully proclaiming the beauty and the wisdom of every part of God's message and His design for us and for His Church. For He has made everything beautiful. That is certainly true.

Our message may seem foolish and weak only to those who are perishing, to those who have hardened their hearts, to those who want the approval of this world more than the approval of God.

But God's message in the Bible is neither foolish, nor weak. In fact, that is the most beautiful account of reality. It is the most majestic, the most meaningful and the most glorious account of what this world is about and who we are and why we are here.

Now this incredible, life-giving, life-transforming, world-changing message of the cross is entrusted to us. We have received it, by God's grace. Not to be ashamed of it, not to change it, not to hide it, but so that we can learn and understand it, so that we can be blessed and so that through us this message can be a blessing to many and many.

I pray that God is gracious to us and help us, when we are challenged by the world and our own desires for approval and recognition, may the Holy Spirit open for us the treasures of God's wisdom and power, may He fill us with joy that we are found worthy to learn the mysteries of God, and may He enable us to share this message with others. Faithfully. Clearly. Winsomely. For it is God's power and God's wisdom.

And don't forget! "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven." That's Jesus, to you. Rejoice!

Amen.