

Rev. Heather McCance's sermon, March 3, 2025

Has it ever occurred to you how completely bizarre we are?

Really, take a look around. You're sitting in pretty uncomfortable seats listening to one person talk. In order to be here, you had to give up the common Sunday morning practice of sleeping in, eating a big breakfast while sipping coffee and reading the newspaper. Many of you got yourselves all dressed up to come. The person to whom you're listening is wearing truly weird clothing. You've been singing music no one sings these days/ using a version of English that's not used anywhere else except by Shakespearean theatre companies. In a few minutes you'll come forward and eat a little circle of something that tastes like styrofoam but that you're not only assured is bread, but that it's the body of someone who died two thousand years ago on the other side of the planet. dead guy.

We are truly bizarre. What we do here makes no sense.

And in the eyes of many of our friends, colleagues, family members and neighbours, it's completely foolish. How many times people have said to me something along the lines of, "But you're so bright. Why are you wasting your life working for the church?" Occasionally the message goes on with a further, "Why would you want to be a part of an institution that is dying?" Often there's even an undertone of, "How could anyone with any brains even believe any of that stuff?"

For many centuries in Europe, and then in the parts of the world the colonial powers came to dominate, the Christian world view dominated so strongly that it was never even questioned. Today, in what has been dubbed post-Christendom, we can understand the world of first-century Corinth to whom Paul was writing.

It was a city that was multi-cultural before the word existed. With ports on either side, Corinth brought together people of all nationalities and religions that existed in Northern Africa, the Mideast, and southern Europe. It was an administrative hub of the Roman Empire, a commercial capital of the region, a centre for sporting contests and a cultural and artistic mecca. Twenty-first century Toronto probably has more in common with first-century Corinth as with the "Toronto the Good" of only 100 years ago.

They were used to anything and everything under the sun. But this Christianity thing was too improbable even for them. Come on, a god who died? Give me a break. Gods do not die. Heck, gods do not become human; they might take human form for a while, but to actually be a human being, to make themselves vulnerable like that? That's not

how gods behave. And the Jews in Corinth weren't any more charitable: the Messiah is supposed to be a great king, or a mighty warrior, or at least a holy priest. This Jesus wasn't any of those things. You guys are a bunch of morons.

The thing is, Paul doesn't fight the perception. He embraces it. Yes, in the eyes of the world, we are morons. The things we believe, the ways in which we strive to live, these things are so very different from the rest of the world around us that of course they think we're insane. By the way they judge things, we are insane.

God, of course, judges by a different standard. And paradoxically it is through looking foolish in the eyes of the world around us that God's strength can be made known. After all, that's what the cross is about, about God's strength shining through most strongly when Jesus appeared to have been weakest, defeated, vulnerable.

The temptation is always there to try to make ourselves look better in the eyes of the world. After all, we have to live in this world, make a living, associate with people who believe other things. So the temptation is for us to be seduced by the messages of the world about what makes someone successful, or admirable, or attractive, because who wouldn't want to be those things?

What would happen, I wonder, if we embraced the fundamental foolishness of what we believe instead of trying to make it more palatable for others?

Some of us are so worried about offending other people that we don't even tell them that we are Christians, that we attend church, that Jesus is important to us. What would happen in your life if you started openly talking about those things? What would happen if you mentioned to someone that you follow Jesus because of his compassion for those who are hurting, or because of his deep desire to see justice done, or because he is a friend to you?

(story about Marlene)

And the next time someone asked that question, "How can someone as smart as you believe in such foolishness?", what would happen if you said, "I guess I'm just a fool." And let that hang there, to see what they say. Because although some of the people who say things like that to us are really challenging us, my hunch is that many of them are genuinely trying to understand, and that they're trying to understand because maybe they'd like to be fools like us, too; they would also like to believe.

What would happen in the church if we were to give up trying to look like successful businesses or attractive service clubs and dove even more deeply into our foolishness, into our identity as followers of the fool who died on the cross instead of fighting back, instead of fighting fire with fire, who insisted on fighting fire with water, hatred with love. W What would it mean if we prayed more and worried less?

I think that the foolishness of our funny clothes and bizarre rituals exist at least in part to remind us that we are supposed to be different from the rest of the world, that we actually are supposed to look and act differently from those around us who are not Christians. And yes, that means that the way we function here on Sunday morning is strange.

But, as we all have been taught, Sunday morning here is also supposed to carry over into the rest of our lives. So rather than coming here simply for a peaceful rest before heading back out there, we are supposed to carry what we do with us as we go out there. We come here to relearn how to be fools in the eyes of the world.

So when we leave here, we know how to be fools. We know how to love even our enemies. We know how to turn the other cheek and risk being vulnerable in a world that seems out to get us. We know how to see deeper than the surface of things and appreciate even those least appreciated by our world. We know how to waste the so-called opportunities for so-called success so that we can serve the least of our sisters and brothers, the people who will probably never be able to pay us back.

Friends, we are Christians. And that means that we are fools. Let us rejoice in being fools for Christ, together. Amen.