



The Sign of the Cross (Looking Cross-Eyed at the World)
I Corinthians 1:18-25
March 7, 2021

I have several different crosses I wear. They are pictured on the front of your bulletin. They all have different meanings for me, and I wear them at different times. The first cross on the left was given to me by my first church in which I was an ordained pastor. This church was in Madison, WI, and the cross was made by a local artist in Madison. It is my everyday cross, and one that I wear the most. I never get tired of it (even after 20 years).

The next cross (second from the left) was given to me by my second church located in New Jersey. Just before I arrived, a neighboring church burned down. This cross is made from the stained glass window of the burned church. I tend to wear this cross in the summer because it is small and light.

The large cross in the middle was given to me by this church when I arrived here. It was made by a jeweler in Tubac. It has gone through several iterations as the stones keep falling out and are replaced by stones of different colors. Whenever that happens, people comment on my "new" cross because it looks different. I have been wearing this cross every Sunday with my robe for the last 11 years.

The fourth cross (second from the left) was Larry DeLong's cross. Larry was the senior pastor here when I arrived 11 years ago. Larry was 6' 5". When he gave the benediction, he would spread his arms out just like the person in this cross. Larry died over 4 years ago when he took his own life. I wear this cross during Lent because it reminds me of the suffering of Larry and the suffering of Jesus as he walked towards the cross.

The last cross on the right is my Easter cross. It is somewhat gaudy and sparkly, joyful and noticeable, and gives me great joy, just like the resurrection.

I wear these crosses because they remind me of whom I follow and that I am a pastor. If you glance into my office, you may see me holding on to the cross I am wearing that day.

I show you my crosses because our scripture passage today is about the cross. Before I read it, let us pray: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read I Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For 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. ¹⁹ For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The cross was an execution tool. It is rather strange that it has become the symbol of Christianity; that we wear an execution tool around our necks. It would be the same as wearing an electric chair around our necks. The cross was a form of capital punishment, and is a symbol of humiliation, defeat, shame. To the world, it was foolish, but this foolishness was the wisdom of God.

God takes this execution tool and uses it to draw people to Himself. Foolishness? Really it is not, because the cross is a message of love and forgiveness. “Forgive them for they know not what they do,” Jesus said while hanging from the cross. “You will be with me in paradise,” Jesus said to the thief next to him while hanging on the cross. Love and forgiveness on full display from the cross.

This is foolishness to the world, but to us it is the power of God.

I remember a man telling story about himself. He had walked away from God and the church many years before. But one Sunday morning, he felt the urge to attend church. He drove to a church near his house, and sat in the pew and waited.

The church service started with a processional - the choir and pastors processing down the center aisle. The procession was led by a cross lifted up high on a pole. As

the cross came by him, the man began to weep. He wanted to fall on the ground before the cross because he knew, at that moment, he was loved by God.

The cross is foolishness to the world, but to us it is the power of God.

Think about that contrast. Imagine in your head a cross. To the left of the cross write "Foolishness to the world." To the right of the cross write "power of God." Opposites, yet both connected to the cross.

There are many opposites in the Bible – love of God/wrath of God; Good/evil; God is light/God dwells in darkness; heaven/hell; free will/predestination. The cross is opposites, too: Foolishness/power of God. A symbol of death/leads to life. God takes the most shameful thing in the world and makes it God's power.

We shouldn't be surprised. God is always doing crazy, opposite things in the Bible. God starts a new nation with a pair of childless senior citizens. Again and again in the Bible, God chooses the younger over the preferred older child. God chooses a stutterer to be spokesperson for his people. God chooses the runt of the litter to be king of Israel.

When the promised Messiah came, he didn't come with power and glory. Instead, he was given a feeding trough for a bed, a common name, poor parents, living in a nowhere town. Then, like a sheep, led to the slaughter. God in his wisdom chose the most scandalous means possible to bring about the world's salvation.

Because of that cross, we have a relationship with God. Because of that cross, we are promised that death is not the end. This ancient sign of death, the cross, is a sign of life. It is a sign of what God has done for us in Christ. Look at the cross and see: Chris died here. Sin died here. Death died here.

(point to cross in sanctuary window). Every Sunday, you see this cross. It wasn't here when I first arrived 11 years ago. In fact, there was no cross anywhere in this sanctuary.

Many of you know Anne Morrison, a member here and our church librarian. Anne's husband, Rev. Fred Morrison, was an associate pastor here. He always noted that the sanctuary had no cross. He passed away shortly before I arrived, so the church put up this cross in his memory.

When it was discussed to put a cross in this window, there was a bit of controversy because people were concerned the cross would block the view of the mountains. So what did we do? We made the cross see-through. Now we look at the world through the cross.

We look at the world through the cross.

What does that mean? What does that look like in our lives? What does it look like in our church as we are reminded every time we worship that we look at the world through the cross?

Looking at the world through the cross means we see Jesus in every person we meet, no matter how they look, smell, speak, dress.

Looking at the world through the cross means we extend forgiveness to those who hurt us; it means we love our enemies; it we pray for those who hate us.

Looking at the world through the cross means we extend and exhibit the fruit of the spirit wherever we go and to whomever we meet: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control.

Looking at the world through the cross means we meet the needs of those we encounter.

Looking at the world through the cross means we see the world with God's eyes.

Looking at the world through the cross means we work with God in this world today.

Looking at the world through the cross means we see our own life through the cross.

Seeing your life through the cross means waking up each day knowing that you are loved by Jesus and no one will ever love you more.

Seeing your life through the cross means you are valued. "But God demonstrated his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ

died for us" (Romans 5:8). You have worth because you are created in God's image.

I love the way Max Lucado says it in a book I am using for a class. He writes, "Jesus' love does not depend on what we do for him. Not at all. In the eyes of the King, you have value simply because you are....You are valuable just because you exist." (from *Jesus: The God Who Knows Your Name*, p 61).

Seeing your life through the cross means you are forgiven. Seeing your life through the cross means you are free to live a life that reflects the love of God.

Someone called it "cross-eyed living." This kind of life doesn't come naturally. It is something we intentionally live each day. Let's pray it will be so.

I have in my hand a cross. It is called a holding cross. You have a picture of it in your bulletin. Notice that it is shaped funny. It is shaped to fit in your hand. The wood is smooth and beautiful...made by our Creator. The wood in this cross is called Bloodwood, a hardwood from Brazil. The red is its natural color.

I take this cross out when I am stressed or grieving or hurt, or just need something to hold on to when I pray. Or, maybe I just need some peace. Sometime I don't say anything...just hold the cross. Feel its peace, and see my life and the world through the cross. May it be so for you as well.

Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

Please stand as we say together what we believe about God, Jesus and the Cross....The Apostle's Creed.

Children's Sermon Feb 25 is opposite day

Tell the children that today is Opposite Day — a day that is all about having fun by doing unexpected things. Explain that on Opposite Day, you can have breakfast for dinner, wear your clothes inside out or start your lunch by eating your dessert first. Ask the children how they would like to celebrate Opposite Day.

Point out that God has made every day into a kind of Opposite Day by showing how Jesus chose love instead of getting even. A lot of people think it's important to get ahead, be first and have a lot of success. Not Jesus. He thought it was most important to love others, even when it wasn't easy, or when others thought it was weak and stupid. Point to the cross in your worship space or sanctuary, and say that the cross stands for loving and forgiving people even when it's not easy. That's opposite of what we're used to. So for Jesus to die on the cross — well, that was considered foolish and weak to many people, which is the opposite of wisdom and strength. Jesus on the cross is the best kind of opposite, because it tells us that "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (v. 25). Encourage them to celebrate God's Opposite Day, and to thank Jesus for giving them forgiveness and eternal life. Close by saying that breakfast for dinner is fun, but nothing is better than God's foolish love, which is always wiser than human wisdom.