

“The Wise Moron”  
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany – 28 & 29 January 2017  
I Corinthians 1:18-31

Nobody likes being called a moron, and if you do, we need to talk, because you have a self-esteem issue, and most people possess enough kindness or at least self-restraint to avoid insulting people by calling them one, but when people use that word, they mean to describe a person who is irredeemably stupid, illogical, uneducated, and unable to see plain sense. I mention this because the Greek word Paul uses, commonly translated into English as “foolish,” actually translates literally as – you guessed it – “moron,” and maybe the knowledge of that fine distinction puts a slightly sharper edge on what Paul wrote to the confused Christians in Corinth. Paul was fighting fiercely on two ideological, theological fronts that competed against one another, but both of them could agree that those who followed Jesus as Messiah were morons.

On the one hand, Greeks prized wisdom, primarily gained through philosophical reflection. They used the tools of careful observation, reason, and logic, to find meaning in the world for their lives, and as one might expect, they came to very different conclusions, even though they all shared a basic set of assumptions and perspectives. Despite their differences, though, all of them viewed Christians as morons. To a Greek-thinking person, the idea of someone being raised bodily from the dead contradicted logic based on centuries of observation and reflection on the natural order.

On the other hand, Jewish people pursued a less abstract way of defining reality. They sought signs revealed by God, concrete irrefutable evidence, tangible proof of truth, but those signs needed to fit within the ancient narrative of their covenant with God. Any signs that deviated from the existing story, as they understood it, they regarded as false signs. To them,

Christians were morons, because in the Jewish interpretation of scripture, a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms.

Being hit on both sides confused the Corinthians Christians and challenged their faith, which is why Paul attacked both systems of thought to expose their inherent weaknesses. Yet while opposing them, Paul rejected neither entirely. Instead, he used them for his own purposes in proper proportion. In his letters, Paul deployed logic and reason beautifully, explaining how God came to dwell among us in Jesus, to save not only Israel but all who place their faith in Jesus. Paul also pointed toward signs and wonders, miracles like the resurrection of the crucified Christ, as proof to show how Jesus qualified as Messiah in continuity with the prophecies of Hebrew scripture, if you looked at them just a little bit differently.

So as you can see, rejecting either way of seeking meaning, whether reason or revelation, defies Paul's practices and manipulates the intention of what he wrote. God gave us rationality, and wants us to use it for His glory. God gives events that reveal who He is, how He operates, and what he expects, so that we can live in right relationship with Him. Faith without reason is blind. Reason without faith is impotent.

I emphasize this because our situation isn't that different from the Corinthians. We live in a world increasingly given over to unexamined fallacies that threaten to seduce us if we're not careful. Scientific materialism, for instance, thinks that truth can only be obtained through a single rigorously-applied method of experimentation and observation. Science isn't bad. It's good, but it needs to be regarded in proper proportion. On the other end of the spectrum, more and more people seem to be resorting to solipsism, creating their own convenient reality without regard for fact or reason, and many reside in a relativistic world, refusing to accept even the

possibility of and enduring truth. Their claims are logical inconsistent, because to say that there is no truth is itself an assertion of truth, which makes the whole project pretty silly.

We live in a world permeated with deception and concealment, propaganda and euphemism, a world where scared and self-serving people twist the truth so hard it shatters into convincing lies or utter nonsense. In this world of materialism, solipsism, relativism, and falsehood, it seems that everybody is calling everybody else a moron, or at least we're thinking it, which though nicer is no less insidious.

How can we escape this vicious cycle of suspicion and accusation and insult? How can we find healing for our hurt and share the healing grace of God with others in desperate need of it? How can we clarify our confusion, cut through the cruelty, and expose the shining light of God's truth that erases the darkness of deceit?

We need to charge up the hill of Calvary toward the cross. Charge up that hill, you big bunch of morons! Claim the power of God, revealed in great weakness on the cross, "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

Declare the transcendence and sovereignty of God, who intervened and overturned and made a huge mess of our certainties and assumptions.

Praise the God of glory who in Christ inaugurated a new era, the coming of a Kingdom of Truth that embarrasses the snide and overwhelms those who pretend to be superior. "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."

Take hold of your life, by letting it go, by giving it away, so that the power of Jesus can flow, so that we can become midwives helping bring new life into the world.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who . . . emptied himself . . . .”  
[Philippians 2:5,7] Don’t be ashamed, faithful moron, but with great humility “boast in the Lord,” source of life, giver of wisdom, love Incarnate, Jesus Christ, and don’t be afraid, for this Jesus, who suffered the cross for our sake, will not abandon you.

Refrain from judging the hateful, the proud, and the greedy. Hold them accountable, by all means. Expose the lie and proclaim the truth, but avoid the poison of judgment. Instead, repent of your own sins and seek forgiveness, and pray for and forgive those who infuriate you and frighten you and disgust you. Burn your resentment in the all-consuming, all-purifying fire of the Holy Spirit.

For the faithful are blessed: “the meek, for they will inherit the earth . . . the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God . . . those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus promised, “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad . . . .”

If, by the grace of God, we do these things, than each and every one of us will daily become, in greater and greater measure, one of the most sublime and wonderful of God’s creatures, the wise moron, a paradox of God’s mystery, a sign of God’s presence, a reason for people to hope for a better world, a world ruled by the peaceful and gracious reign of Jesus’ unchanging love.

But how? Give me a map. Carve a path. Well, my fellow fools, take time each day – and I know how busy we all are – to pause for few holy moments. Open the eyes of your heart, and observe. Open your mind, reflect and remember. The seeds of faith implanted in me and

you are sprouting and bearing fruit, and though not fully mature, not yet fully grown in the faith, for that process is endless, God nevertheless works in the world through us.

Only the wise moron feeds the hungry, clothes the cold, shelters the outcast, and listens to the lonely, and we're doing those things. It takes a wise moron to insist on justice, regardless of risk or cost, to demand freedom for the oppressed and relief for the poor, as the prophet Micah required. Reconciliation, that quest for unity, the vision to perceive beyond the divisions – that's a task for a wise moron.

Nobody but a moron would sacrifice self joyfully, adopt a label of derision and transform it into a badge of courage and consider themselves blessed, but that's the way of the cross, the way to redemption, the way to true wisdom and peace. Drag your crossbeam through the dust and up the hill. Pick up and drag your crossbeam and leave a line that leads to people to Jesus. Amen.