

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Saint Paul writes, “For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.” (1 Cor 1:25 NRSV) I am so glad this is true. It also scares the living daylights out of me. After all, if God’s foolishness is wiser than my wisdom, where in the world does my foolishness stack up?

I’ve done some foolish things in my life. I’ve driven across the country in two and a half days without stopping. I arrived in *and* left North Dakota in a blizzard. I resigned my Air Force commission less than seven years from retirement. Some folks think that marrying into an instant family with three boys—all in or about to enter college—is the epitome of foolishness. But I declare to you, nothing I have done is more foolish than standing before you and declaring, “Jesus is Lord!”

I make this declaration to you, and to the world, in spite of the complete lack of physical evidence. Jesus has not appeared before me and shown me his diplomas, resumes, and letter from God. I have not received a visit from the Holy Spirit to enlighten me, nor have I shared a cup of coffee with God as he explained how all of this works. No, I confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God based only on what I have read in the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament. Jesus Christ is my Lord, even though it makes absolutely no sense that God—the omniscient and omnipotent Creator of all things—would intentionally send his only Son into the world to be born as a human being from the womb of a teenage girl. Why would God put the poor child through the agony of childbirth, especially in a society where out of wedlock pregnancy was a capital offense? Why would God both with having to learn to walk, talk, and read, let alone deal with growth spurts, attending worship, and going through puberty? Why was it necessary for God to send his Son into the desert for forty days, then into hostile areas for ministry? Why, above all things, was it such a great idea that God Incarnate be convicted in a kangaroo court by clueless religious leaders and a mid-level bureaucrat from an occupying country and then be nailed to the cross in the cruelest form of execution known to the world?

It just doesn’t make any sense. By what logic can one say that this is the way that things should be? Nice Jewish boys don’t act out. Gods don’t die, let alone allow themselves to be executed by the mere mortals they created. Why should I, or

anyone else, declare that Jesus is Lord and Savior? It just doesn't make sense. It is foolishness, that's what it is.

And God's foolishness is wiser than any human wisdom, so there is obviously a reason for all this. As Paul declares, the Jews wanted signs that Jesus was the Messiah—white horses, powerful military action, an end to occupation---and the Greeks, the Gentiles in general, wanted logic and wisdom—a God that didn't intentionally become a human just to get himself killed.

Yes, these are stumbling blocks and foolishness for those who do not hear God's call.

These are stumbling blocks to those who choose to ignore the Holy Spirit's call and choose not to live in faith.

Faith, my dear sisters and brothers, means believing in the unbelievable. There is no logical reason to accept Jesus is Lord, except that the witness of the sacred Scriptures so clearly makes the case for that very fact. When we read and study the Old and New Testaments, explore the apparently silent role of the Holy Spirit that really isn't silent in our lives, and stop to *listen* to what we have heard and seen, how can we not believe? How can we not have faith?

If we can have faith in God, the Father and Creator of all things, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son who came and died so that we might be freed from sin, and in the Holy Spirit, who walks with us each day until the reign of Christ comes again, how can we *not* have faith in much smaller matters.

Tonight, this congregation will gather for its annual congregational dinner and meeting. Around the table of fellowship, we will talk, share ideas, hopes, and dreams. We will reflect on the year past—very briefly, to be sure—and begin to look forward to the year ahead in great detail. We will hear a budget presentation that requires us to have faith that the Holy Spirit is indeed calling us to ministry in this place. We will pray over that budget and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us, strengthen us, and lead us to find ways not just to meet the financial needs, but to actually accomplish the ministry that those finances support. It will take an act of faith to move forward.

We will also hear a presentation asking for congregational support and approval for a radical new ministry at Abiding Presence. For those who thought starting a Korean language ministry was a leap of faith, the new ministry is an opportunity to stretch our faith. We will be asked to approve the establishment of an elementary school here at Abiding Presence as part of our ministry. Yes, the proposal will cost money initially, but you will hear all of the details tonight, and can read about the school in your annual report packages which will be provided to you as you leave worship today.

Having faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior might be considered the greatest challenge to human understanding. Having faith in ourselves that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all things are possible is more difficult to most.

Shortly, we will confess that we believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. That confession is made on faith, not on empirical facts and figures. We will confess that we believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of Mary, suffered, was crucified, and buried for three days, and then rose in victory over sin, death, and the devil so that we might live forever in God's love, redeemed from all our sinfulness. We will confess that we believe in God, the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting. Where are the signs demanded by the Jews? Where is the wisdom demanded by the Gentiles?

No where, friends. Signs and wisdom are the desires of human beings in all their wisdom and understanding. For God, these are foolishness. But God loves the fools of his creation anyway. God calls fools—those who aren't as smart as everyone else, those who aren't as powerful, those not as noble—to come and see, to follow, to walk in faith and not by sight.

Our ministry here walks in that faith, led by the Holy Spirit. If that's foolishness on my part, call me a fool. A fool for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A fool for the love of God.