

March 4 Third Sunday of Lent, Discovery Weekend, Communion  
Theme: Making Me New: A Fool for Christ

All during the season of Lent, the 40 days plus Sundays from Ash Wednesday until Easter Sunday, we are focusing not just on what we can restrict in our lives, but how God is making us new as we seek and find Him. The focus for this in our church body has been to seek God and be committed to being made new through the reading of the Bible each day. During this Discovery weekend, we have also been Discovering God's Love through the Bible.

We've had great testimony to the power of Christ through songs and the youth skit today. I think we have been well prepared to hear part of the Apostle Paul's letter to the churches at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

*<sup>18</sup> The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved. <sup>19</sup> It is written in scripture: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent. <sup>20</sup> Where are the wise? Where are the legal experts? Where are today's debaters? Hasn't God made the wisdom of the world foolish? <sup>21</sup> In God's wisdom, he determined that the world wouldn't come to know him through its wisdom. Instead, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching. <sup>22</sup> Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. <sup>24</sup> But to those who are called—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God's power and God's wisdom. <sup>25</sup> This is because the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

In a world that values power, money, success, victory, and the like, the cross is foolishness because it is weakness, poverty, failure and loss. The way of Jesus, the way of turning the other cheek, forgiving seventy-seven times, loving our enemy and praying for those who persecute us, seems like absolutely lunacy.

Anybody who chooses to go the extra mile, to give more than is asked, or the one who returns a smile for a frown or a gentle word after just being completely chewed out is one who looks like a fool. Weak. Ignorant. Silly. Loser.

But still, for those who have experienced God and accepted God's great love and forgiveness and grace, the way of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness and self-control is freedom and it makes all the sense in the world.

I've known Jesus a long time and I find it hard to imagine how the love and mercy and grace of God could seem so silly. But it's really like anything else. While I don't remember the first time I felt the love of God, I do remember the magic of our first trip to Disney World last November. Before the trip I was hesitant about it and I wasn't sure it was worth the money. I was excited because so many people I know and love had been and they assured me that it would be magical and they gave me tips and tricks and one friend even created a road map for our days at the parks and helped me navigate the whole process because it is a language and world unto itself.

And the end result of trusting those who had gone before us, and accepting help to have the greatest trip we could have and Disney being true to what they claim, we had a truly magical time. And it's something that you can't really describe to someone else. You just have to be there to experience the magic.

That is not unlike being a Christian and being part of a church. If you haven't been raised in it, it's full of concepts and procedures and activities that are unfamiliar. And the wonder, the power, the mystery of following Jesus seems really strange from the outside looking in. It just does.

But that's because God's love isn't really something that one can just study or hear about. To make sense it must be experienced. Some of us experience that love in church, for some of us it might be strong when we are in nature and can see some of God's amazing creation. Some of us experience God's love through the songs we sing while others could care less about music and really want to pray or others who experience God through what Paul calls the foolishness of preaching.

And I feel him on that. It's tremendously humbling to know that God uses myself and so many other ordinary, everyday people to speak the truth of Jesus – the foolishness of the cross and the way of love – in ways that help others draw near to the throne of God.

But that's what God does. God uses people just like me and just like you all to tell others about the foolishness of the cross of Christ that only makes sense once you experience forgiveness, acceptance, grace, mercy, and love in ways you never imagined before.

And what happens when we experience something life-changing? We tell others about it. Except it feels harder to tell others about how much Jesus makes a difference in our lives than other things. I bet most of us have experienced a movie that we tell people

they must see or a book they must read or a food they must try because we have had some kind of experience that has changed our lives or at least impacted our lives for the good.

Over the course of this season of Lent I hope that we experience God's love and spend time in God's presence in such a way that we want to tell others about it. Over the course of this Discovery Weekend I hope that we have experienced God's love so much that we want to tell others about it.

And in his great desire for everyone possible to experience his love through the foolishness of the cross, Jesus gave us a way to experience his love not just in thoughts and words, but in taste and touch and smell through what we call Communion.

Because I know we have folks here from a variety of traditions, I want us all to know that in the United Methodist Church all who are present and desire to live in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord are welcome to receive the elements. But if for any reason you do not want to receive the elements in worship today, that is always up to you. Our Communion Servers will pass trays of bread which you can take one and then wait until all have been served and we will receive together or if you would like to come to the altar to kneel and receive while the trays are being passed in the pews you are welcome to come forward to be served.

Let us now prepare our hearts and minds to share in this holy meal...