

## The Cross

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This week we walk once again the Via Dolorosa, the way of suffering, as we journey to the cross and beyond. When the church was in its infancy, the apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth about the power of the cross. Paul recognized that our proclamation of salvation through the crucifixion of Jesus was a stumbling block for the religious people of his day and sounded like foolishness to those who prided themselves on the wisdom of their well-reasoned philosophy.

Crucifixion was a fate reserved for criminals and agitators, for the unrighteous. The cross was viewed by the people as a symbol of shame and Roman oppression. What kind of Messiah makes his claim based on the humiliation of public execution? The Messiah is supposed to end such practices, bring down the powers that perpetuate them, not die by them. It's a stumbling block.

To learned ears it simply sounded foolish to claim something so obviously tragic as good news. It made no sense. From all accounts, what Jesus suffered was a too common fate of those who came up against the greater power of Rome. He lost; they killed him, end of story. To turn around and call such a clear defeat "victory" strained credulity and was simply absurd, foolishness.

And so it remains today. In many of the large campuses of some of this country's most popular and populous churches there is nary a cross to be found. Through careful research these churches have discovered that the cross is viewed negatively by the spiritual seekers they hope to attract to their positive purposeful message. You can have your best life without such a downer that turns people off. It's a stumbling block.

In the larger culture the cross is considered sadistic. What kind of God would require something so horrific in order to be appeased? Isn't such a claim just further proof of how primitive Christians are in their thinking? Obviously, reasonable people should reject something as base as blood sacrifice. It's foolishness.

Little has changed in nearly 2,000 years. But as Paul put it so long ago, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are." Think about it.

The cross saves us from having to be the wisest, the strongest, the highest or the mightiest. As people of the cross we know its power precisely because we recognize how truly foolish it would be to pretend that we are something that we are not. Pretensions of piety and wisdom will never save us from the truth of our failure to be fully who God created us to be. Only the cross can do that.

And if we will walk the way of suffering all the way to the foot of the cross, if we will take the time to set all pretension aside, then when we set off for the tomb on Sunday morning on what seems like a fool's errand, we may find ourselves marveling at the power of God to transform our every failure into everlasting victory.