The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
February 1, 2026- 4th Sunday after Epiphany-A
Given at Christ Church Quaker Farms, Oxford, CT
Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Cor 1: 18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

'For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.' †

Earlier this week, when I was reflecting on today's scripture, I pondered over the passage from St. Paul: "'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise… and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'" I find it humorous that this passage comes up regularly around the time of the anniversary my ordination to the priesthood— "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (vs.25).

Paul's words are part of a longer response, some of which we heard last week, responding to dissent within the first century Corinthian Church and the conflicts and bickering among its members… some were forming factions and cliques and trying to gain power and superiority over other members. Let me read his words again: 'I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and same purpose.'
Again, hauntingly appropriate and timely, given the conflicts across our nation and as our parish, like so many Episcopal parishes, prepares for our annual meeting and discern our future together. As I mentioned last week, divisions within a community—be it a nation, a political party, a religious community, or a family— can easily erode into animosities. Strongly held views (right or wrong) can lead people to reject those who have differing views. They can lead to a break down in fellowship with others and toward the condemnation and even demonization of another. We are witnesses to this today.
So, Paul's words are needed now, for they help us remember to deal with those who differ from us in a spirit of compassion. St. Paul's main point is that the saving grace of God does not come from any human leader or group; it comes from the sacrificial love of God. It's wrong to identify the Christian faith with one particular understanding, belief, or practice, and it's wrong to identify our Church with one particular group or person. We, who call ourselves Christian, are called to move away from the tendencies so prevalent in our society now, the desire to be right, to win, to be in control… for these are simple human pursuits, not God's. Of course, we should express our beliefs and values, *and* we must also listen when others do the same. It's not about self-denial or submission, but about fellowship and compassion. Think about that phrase we heard today… "God's foolishness is wiser than our wisdom."

Consider for a moment, the basics of our faith—God emptied God's self and took the form of a slave, becoming human… and then on the Cross, God emptied God's self some more and accepted suffering and death, only to overcome death through resurrection. This is what Paul describes as apparent "foolishness." In the Greek the word is *moria* ('folly'), which is related to another word, *mania* ('insanity'); by human standards, this message of Christ and the mystery of the Cross is not just foolish, but madness! And yet, Paul tells us, *this is how God works*, both then and *now*.

The love of God made manifest by the actions of Jesus Christ is the eternal love that shines light into darkness of our world. A Love which became weak, took on flesh, suffered, and died. God chose to save the world through *such* 'foolishness'— the mystery of Jesus and the Cross.

So, what's this mean for us, here at CCQF today? What does it mean for all Christians now? I think it has tremendous ramifications for those of us who think we know what is best. For those of us who place so much emphasis on power and human knowledge. For, whether we are dealing with parish budgets or deciding who will lead the parish in the coming year, things are not always what we may expect, or intend, or even desire. Living as Christians is not about getting our way or bickering over details, it's not about having things the way we want them, it's about living as the 'Body of Christ.' The grace and power of God does not come through particular leaders or groups, whether in larger society or in this parish Church. God's ways are not human ways. God's way is the way of the Cross—a confusing, overwhelming, incomprehensible expression of the power of love— it's the way of unselfish, sacrificial love.

Take a moment and think about what we are about to say and do during Eucharist this morning. Our Anglican/ Episcopal Eucharistic prayers use the word, "*remembrance*." The word "remember" brings out a present dynamic in a past event. To "re-member" is to 'put together again' and this is just what happens. As a community we celebrate the mystery of his dying, by breaking bread in his memory. And in the fragmenting, the brokenness, we celebrate *our UNITY* as the one Body of Christ. The mystery is not only that Jesus' broken life is put back together again in the resurrection, but that *each celebration* of the Eucharist in our community is a re-membering of Christ, putting back together of what was broken and smashed. And in re-membering, *we* become members of that Body, the extension of Christ's eyes, ears, hands, feet, and mouth in the world!

Paul assures us, God chooses what is weak to be strong, those who seem foolish to spread wisdom. In the Beatitudes we heard in the Gospel today, Jesus taught that God chooses the side of the weak, the forgotten, the despised, the persecuted, and the peacemakers. And *so must we*, even when the world says that's foolish and futile.

The author and theologian, Kenneth Leech, points out (*We Preach Christ Crucified,* p.10)— "Religion goes disastrously astray when it ceases to be a sign of contradiction and becomes the cement of social conformity. The foolishness of God is then replaced by capitulation to the values of the world." So, he urges the Christian community to be "transformed" rather than "conformed."

As we come to the altar in a few moments, and later this morning as we participate in our Annual Parish Meeting, let's strive to *transform*, *to follow him*. Follow the way of God, follow Jesus. 'For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom…'
'I appeal to you… In the name of Lord Jesus Christ… that there be no divisions among you… that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose'… the love of God, in our Lord Jesus Christ. ✝