

1 Corinthians 1:18–31: <sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

<sup>20</sup>Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

<sup>26</sup>For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup>But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup>God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup>And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup>so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

### “Proper Boasting”

#### INTRODUCTION

Unless you read the Washington Post editorial section, you may not have heard that Garrison Keillor has decided to look for a new religion. Yes, the man who made Midwestern Lutheranism and church potlucks famous—if not funny—has decided to find a new religion. Do you want to know why? Trump’s election! But it isn’t so much Trump, per se, that has Keillor looking for a new religion ... he wrote in his opinion piece: “Too many of my fellow Christians voted for selfishness and for degradation of the beautiful world God created. I guess they figured that by the time the planet was a smoky wasteland, they’d be nice and comfy in heaven, so wotthehell. Anyhow, I’m looking around for other options.”

From Keillor's point of view, his fellow-Christians are nothing to boast about because they didn't vote the way he thought they should vote. But Keillor's intellectual elitism is beside the point. With all of his used-to-be-funny stories about mundane Midwestern Lutheranism, he lost sight of what real Christianity is. It isn't how agreeable the Church is to the culture—or how nice Christians are—or how Christianity makes you feel—it's about what God has done for us poor, miserable sinners in Christ Jesus,

JUST AS THE APOSTLE PAUL PROCLAIMS: OUR PROPER BOAST IS NOT IN OURSELVES, BUT IN CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED; FOR JESUS ALONE IS OUR WISDOM, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, OUR SANCTIFICATION AND OUR REDEMPTION.

I. We can't boast in ourselves or the church.

"I, a poor, miserable sinner." That's what we confess as we open the Divine Service. Those words turn a lot of people off, but they are honest words because truthfully, what do we have to offer God? Take away Jesus and all we have is our worldly wealth, works and wisdom. But what is that to God? Paul writes: <sup>20</sup>Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

If you had to stand before God on His Holy Mountain, what would you have to give Him? What could you do that would impress Him? What would you have to boast about? Micah asks this question in our Old Testament reading: "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has

told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Can any of us boast that we have given the Lord the justice, kindness and humility that He requires? The honest answer of course is, “No.” Jesus teaches that if we keep the commandments perfectly, we’ve just done our duty (Lk. 17:10)—that’s it—nothing to really boast about! And if that wasn’t enough, the prophet Isaiah writes that even our righteous works—even the things we think are great—are as filthy rags in God’s sight (Is. 64:6).

But that’s the wisdom of our age, isn’t it? You want something—you work hard for it—you achieve it—you get to brag about it. But God says to worldly wisdom, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

When we measure our lives against God’s Commandments—when we look at ourselves through the eyes of God—we don’t see much to boast about. And even when we measure ourselves according to worldly standards, there’s really not much to boast about, either. Like Paul said, “<sup>26</sup>For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.”

Those are the things that the world boasts in: money, smarts, power, and birthright. But not many of us excel in any of those areas. So, it should surprise us every time we start to think that we’re better than someone else—that we somehow measure up and they don’t. We all too quickly forget that one of the virtues that God demands is humility before Him, for we are all equally sinners before God.

Martin Luther put it another way. After he died, a note was found in one of the pockets of his pants. On it he had written, “Wir sind bettler. Hoc est verum.” That’s a combination of German and Latin. It means, “We are all beggars, that is true.” It is true: We come to God as

humble beggars with empty sacks—we have nothing to offer him, nothing of ourselves that would give us reason to boast before Him.

## II. Our Boast is in Jesus.

That's our life without Jesus—nothing to boast about before God. But you see, Jesus makes all the difference in the world. Paul writes: “<sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

As poor, miserable sinners we come before God with empty sacks, beaten down by His Law, the world, and our sins. We come to God with empty sacks, humbly seeking His mercy. And He graciously and abundantly fills those sacks with Jesus—with His forgiveness, His life, His salvation, His peace, His love, His every blessing. Everything we need to stand before God's Holy Presence, He gives us in Jesus: wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption!

You would have none of this by your own power and might—it is only yours because of Jesus. That's why Paul says, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

That indeed is the proper boast, for forgiveness isn't earned, heaven isn't something you work for, pleasing God isn't something you can do by your own power and might—these are all gifts of God through faith in Jesus Christ and Him Crucified.

The greatest boast that we have is this, that Jesus loves me, a sinner, and that He died for me on the cross!”

II. God's Boast is in the believer.

But as you read our text, there is another kind of boasting going on here: “<sup>27</sup>But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup>God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

Did you catch it? God's has a boast to make, too! You—ordinary, everyday believers in Christ crucified—are God's boast. You are evidence to the world that God's Word has the power to save—that the cross is the place of redemption. While the world laughs and scoffs at God's Son on the cross, God points to you to show the world how foolish and how weak it is!

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said this about John the Baptist: “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.” But then He said this about you, “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11).

While the world may not value you because you follow Jesus, trust His Word, and are guided by His wisdom—and not the world's wisdom, God's boasts in you!

There are times when you do indeed feel impoverished, like a beggar—when your sins leave you feeling poor and miserable, when the challenges of a broken world leave you feeling weak and powerless, but it is God who lifts you up in Christ. It is God who removes your beggar's clothing and adorns you with righteousness; it is God who fills your emptiness with the riches of His Word; it is God who takes your eyes from a dying world and places them on your life-giving Savior.

And while you properly boast in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, God boasts in you!

## CONCLUSION

Somewhere along the way, Garrison Keillor has lost the true meaning of Christianity. While he was looking down his nose at his fellow-believers for not voting the way he thought they should vote, he failed to see what was right under his nose: the Jesus who saves sinners—the bloody sacrifice that makes the unwashed clean—the Righteous One through whom we are made righteous—the only real boast any sinner has!

In Jesus' Name. Amen.