**What is the World to Me?**

Based on [1 Corinthians 1:18-31](http://biblia.com/books/esv/1Co1.18)

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The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

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There was a story once told by Paul Harvey that got a lot of mileage in Christian circles. It was about a man who wouldn't go to church with his wife on Christmas. He just couldn't believe that God became a man, and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. So came Christmas eve and she went to church, and then it began to snow heavily. He sat down to rest by the fire when he began to hear an occasional "thump" "thud." He looked outside and saw a flock of birds huddled in the snow...they were flying into his landscape window trying to escape the storm.

The man then thought of his barn, how if he could lead them there they would be safe from the storm. First he tried a trail of breadcrumbs to the barn, but they wouldn't come. Then he tried catching them. No good. He waved his arms shooing them, instead they scattered in every direction except the warm lighted barn. Then he realized they were afraid of him. He realized to them I am a strange and terrifying creature. "**If I only could be a bird**", he thought to himself, "and mingle with them and speak their language, I could tell them not to be afraid. If I could become one of them, then I could show them the way to the warm safe...." then upon his face amazement. He understood why God became man.

It's a nice story isn't it? Heartwarming, but is it true?...Not really. It leaves something very important out of the Christmas message, something central to the Gospel. It leaves out the cross. For once, , Paul Harvey did not tell the "Rest of the Story", because he does not tell us about Christ Crucified. Jesus was not born so that God could relate to us, condescend to us, "meet us where we're at", or endear himself to our sensibilities. Jesus was born for us to die for us. Jesus was born to die on the cross. Please **remember this, Jesus did not come into the world to become like it. Jesus came into the world to be rejected by it.**

Our Epistle lesson says, "**Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 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." And a little later, "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, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are**" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). Hear the word of the Lord. God did not come into the world to be like the world. He came into the world to be a man who is unlike it, and unliked by it.

And why would He do that? Why wouldn't he become like the world? It sure would make him easier to relate to? Why did God become man in order to be rejected by the world? Paul tells us, "**So that no human being might boast in the presence of God**" (1 Corinthians 1:29).

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, probably of noble birth, powerful enough to be among the religious elite, said to be a "ruler of the Jews" a member of the Sanhedrin. And he had heard of, maybe even witnessed Jesus' miraculous signs and knew they had to be from God. And so, it says in John 3 that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. By night…so that his colleagues wouldn't know. Like one of the cool kids sneaking off to date an unpopular girl. He likes her, but his friends can't know...he's got a reputation to protect! Nicodemus has a reputation to protect too. He can't be seen with Jesus because he will be rejected by the world he knows, but thanks be to God he's drawn to Him anyway.

Now if God became man only so that we wouldn't be afraid of him, to "break down barriers" so people can approach him easier, why didn't he become a Pharisee, I mean a good Pharisee, caring and loving right. **Or why didn't he situate himself on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Ruling Council, as a good guy...he could do a lot of good there.** And people would think to look for God and His representative there. And Nicodemus wouldn’t have to feel embarrassed to speak to Jesus, He could walk up to him in broad daylight and talk shop, and at night share some cigars at the local pub and sing karaoke post selfies together on Facebook. Had Jesus been on the Sanhedrin or a Pharisee, or the Chief Priest, Nicodemus would come in broad daylight without having to be embarrassed before the world...but you see, that’s the point. To come to Jesus is embarrassing to one who still has one foot in the world, and Jesus wants to embarrass you to expose your worldly commitments, so that when it is exposed you have to come in shame that is, in repentance.

You hear a lot of talk today about churches wanting to do ministry in a new way. They are earnest in "breaking down barriers" to Jesus and the Gospel. "Removing stumbling blocks" that would make people fall on the way to their Lord. **But Paul says in our Epistle exactly this, "Jews demand signs and Greeks wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, *a stumbling block* to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks" (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).** God did not send his son so all could have comfortable access to him. By the cross, God boobytrapped access to his Son. The way of salvation that he prepared with the incarnation and the cross, God did that to prevent certain people from accessing him…those who would demand signs of God, those who would demand better explanations for his actions God put up a "no access" sign by pinning salvation itself...salvation "Himself" to a shameful and scandalous cross.

When the Jews demand a sign from Jesus, he says, The only sign I will give you is the sign of Jonah (Matthew 16:4), the sign of the cross, and I give it to make you stumble, that is to make you repent. If you're going to access God, your pride and your arrogance and your worldly ties, your bright ideas, your "two bits," your "worldly wisdom" are going to have to stumble over the cross and you have to leave them there with the rest of your sin. Do you actually think God needs your worldly wisdom and advice, your business acumen, your people skills, street smarts and practical insight about how the world works? Maybe you have a few pointers on how God could better to run his church than by just preaching the cross. “*That turns people off and limits access to God*.” Maybe you have great ideas on how to grow God's church that you need to bring to Him so He knows how to “Make the Church Great again”! And Jesus says, yes bring these ideas to me, and I will take them and do with them what I've done with the rest of your sin, put them to death on the cross.

Brothers, the wisdom of the world is any wisdom that doesn't come from the Word of God alone. Do you, O man, have some bright ideas? Street smarts? personal viewpoints on how to save the world or the church or the family? If they are truly your own and not sourced in God's Word, then they are worldly wisdom and worthless idols that need to be crucified. "**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?" (1 Corinthians 1:20). *...with the cross.***

The cross requires repentance, and don't be fooled. Today's churches that don't preach the cross in its full, scandalous, penitential force, it is because they are trying to make a way for unrepentant people to come to God. The cross crucifies all sin and is a filter that makes sure the proud, and the stubborn, and the disobedient, and the revilers, the rebellious, who we all are by our sinful nature, cannot come to God without first stumbling over the cross, falling to our knees and saying "God be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

In the book of Exodus, when God gives the 10 Commandments, He says *this* in the midst of his address… "**I the Lord your God am a jealous God**" (Exodus 20:5). God is jealous, he does not share his people with other gods. He alone is their suitor, no others, and that is why he came into the world to be rejected by it. Ladies, if you spend hours in the morning putting on makeup and shopping hours every week for the sexiest clothes in order to find a man...what kind of man are you trying to find? One that likes airbrushed sexy women. Sounds to me like you're looking for a man who's going to cheat on you, either in his heart or in reality, the moment you are no longer able to "break down barriers" to his accepting you.

So too, God didn't become man like putting on makeup to be easier on the eyes. He became a man that was despised in the eyes of the world because he is a jealous God. He doesn't put up a false front or deny who he really is to get you to like him better. He isn't that corny dad who puts his hat on backwards and raps about the dangers of drugs to be “relevant” to his kids. Dad, just say what you mean and don’t patronize me.

God doesn’t patronize you. He isn't condescending to you. He doesn't pretend he's something he's not because then he's trying to be your idol, your false god, and not the one true God who loves you, and paid the price for your sin so that you can live in eternity with him. No, **God doesn't *think* he's better than you.** He ***is*** better than you, and He doesn't try to hide that fact in order preserve your dignity and pride so he can meet your approval and the approval of the world. He comes to crush your dignity so that you will have nothing to boast in before him except the cross of his Son taken up for you because He is Love, and love is Zealous; His Love is Jealous, and he's not willing to share you, his beloved, with the World. So he comes as one despised by the world so that you cannot have them both. For what accord does Christ have with the World? Not to be acceptable to it; but to die for it and insodoing choose disciples out of the world through the preaching of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Ladies and gentlemen, a jealous spouse is a good thing, isn’t it? You wouldn’t want a spouse that didn’t care who you brought into bed. Jesus alone is your bridegroom, and he’s no slouch. You have eyes for the world, and its lusts are in you from birth, for the iniquity of the fathers are visited upon the children (Exodus 20:5)`, and Adam, our first father, brought corruption into our hearts. With your world-laced eyes Jesus does not look very attractive, but just remember, you appear uglier to him than he does to you. But then again, he doesn’t expect you to wear any makeup to impress him. You come as you are, he takes your hand to the altar, decks you with His righteousness to present you before his Father without any wrinkle or blemish or any such stain (Ephesians 5:27). He is the bridegroom you want, whom you can submit to with joy, for he showed his love for you in this, while you were still sinners, He died for you (Romans 5:8), and in your Baptism, he put your sin to death (Romans 6:6) and raised you to new life in him (Romans 6:4). Your old self was crucified in Baptism, and now your life is hidden [from the wisdom of the world] with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3).

And on the last day he will raise you up and give you new eyes that are not blinded by the world, but can see the splendor of your beautiful savior in his kingdom which has no end. What is the world to Christ? The world is Christ’s crucifier; and yet Christ’s is the world’s redeemer.

The world seeks to be praised  
 And honored by the mighty  
Yet never once reflects  
 That they are frail and flighty.  
But what I truly prize  
 Above all things is He,  
My Jesus, He alone.  
 What is the world to me!

("What is the World to Me" v2; LSB 730)