

February 26, 2017 **Transfiguration Sunday**
Sermon: *The Little Tramp* **Pastor Clay Oglesbee**

**Texts: 1 Corinthians 3 and 4 (selected verses),
Matthew 17:1-9** (segment of Chaplin's silent movie)
Charlie Chaplin's silent movies like these—*The Immigrant, The Little Tramp, and A Dog's Life* are now 100 years old.

I say they are *old*, but not dated.

The circumstances or desperations they depict are of immigrants' fears, separations, hunger, and poverty. All these are all a century-old in the US yet contemporary again. We still see the humor and the pathos in them. They are funny movies. Yet, we also see this--**why doesn't anybody help the poor guy, the hungry one, the tramp, the immigrant, the one treated like a dog?** Why are all the bosses, police, politicians, officials, promoters and technicians so fixated on the mechanics, practicality, efficiency and profits of the situation that no one even bothers about the Little Tramp's misery? Chaplin's own question, behind his silent film humor, seems to be: *what about the little man? What about the last in line? What about the least of these? Who cares for the human being literally trapped in the grip of the times?*

There is, or at least there should be, a sort of built-in, Charlie-Chaplin foolishness and compassion in our faith. Chaplin was always putting his little tramp, his little

fool, into the deep-fat fryer, the boiling-hot troubles and issues of his times, yet somehow the little man triumphed by kindness to others and resilience.

In our day, the Little Tramp—the put-upon trickster and the holy, battered dreamer, the refugee, the newcomer, the poor one—are all contemporary faces or icons of the Christ. So is the drowned Syrian child—Christ. So are the refugees on sinking boats in the Mediterranean—Jesus among the least of these. So are the Muslims and Mexicans we distrust at our borders—Jesus as the enemy we are to love.

This is no insult to our faith. I don't mean this is the foolishness of pure silliness. I don't mean it is the foolishness of a person's greed or other vices leading to their own self-humiliation. I don't even mean that it is demeaning foolishness of being slapped silly by the powers in the way that Charlie Chaplin's little man is. No, I mean what Paul means in his letter to the Corinthians: *that there is a wisdom from God that only appears foolish in the world, but which has a great beauty to it, for it is the foolishness of Christ, the foolishness of the supposedly powerless, supposedly ineffective, little man, the prophet, Jesus, who stubbornly refuses to settle for anything less than the kingdom of God on earth.*

By the wisdom of God, such divine foolishness is part of our religion. If Jesus of Nazareth can be transfigured into glorious radiance by the power of God, as our text from Matthew asserts today, so can he also be transfigured into the wounded sufferings of human history, as the Apostle Paul says. He must be illumined and glorious or broken and wounded, according to God's will and purpose. No glory without the cross and no cross without glory.

Think about Jesus' most distinctive teachings. What does he teach that is undeniably his own, divine wisdom? Isn't it something foolish in the world, ironic, and joyous?

--if someone *strikes* you, turn the other cheek

--if someone *forces* you to go a mile with them, *freely* go *two*

--if someone *compels* you to give up your shirt, offer your jacket, too

--love your *enemies*, prayer for those who *persecute* you and bless them

All of these instructions were in his Sermon on the Mount, and they sounded as foolish then as they do today. Only the impractical and foolish would take such risks, to believe and practice such things! *Maybe we are too smart for this. By God, we know how to protect*

ourselves! We know how to hit back! Only a fool for Christ would take this stuff seriously! Only a fool would try to live the Sermon on the Mount out! Right? But there is more!

--*give your life away* for God's sake, then you will *gain* it
--the *greatest* among you is the *servant* of all
--find your greatest freedom in humility and obedience
--discover that Christ is to be found among the poor and suffering and the enemy, among "the least of these"
--trust that *your* redemption will come from a man who was feared by the state, tortured by the state, judged by the state, and died in a state execution.

How *stupid* would you have to be to follow Jesus?

I read recently about a fellow who went on a college class trip into New York City. He saw his first Street Preacher working the sidewalks. The Preacher had on a sandwich message board. One side read, "I am a fool for Christ." The other side said, "*Who are you a fool for?*" I guess that's the point. We are always going to spend our time making fools of ourselves for *something* or *somebody*. What's *your* choice?

The gospel calls us to be "Fools for Christ". We could try it out. But what would it be like?

We could try it this week. We could fight against all our
Midwestern Minnesota Reasonableness and do
something foolish for Christ. We could try to:

- forgive someone who doesn't even ask for, or deserve,
forgiveness
- be kind to someone we don't know and who won't pay
us back
- stop being just nice and tolerant--and start being
deeply compassionate
- love our enemy, instead of fighting fire with fire
- resolve to let someone "begin again" in our affections,
in spite of all the ways they have disappointed or
betrayed us
- give to someone who cannot repay us
- pray for someone's healing or their deeper spiritual
conversion to God and neighbor, against all the odds
that we can see

AND last but not least...

(Charlie Chaplin's walk out of pulpit)

--give thanks for the foolishness of the little man, Jesus.