

Christians, are you prepared to be thought of as fools by the world? Are you prepared for the world to laugh at you because of what you believe? If not, why not? Those are the questions we should consider as we think about what Mark writes about our Lord suffering in our reading for this evening.

Because Mark tells us that it is now morning on Good Friday, and Jesus has been condemned to be crucified. But before they crucify him, the Roman soldiers decide they're going to have a little fun at Jesus's expense. And so they take him into the governor's headquarters, and they say among themselves, "We're going to make him into a king!" You should've heard them laugh, Christians, laughing and roaring at how funny this all was. Because Jesus was a great big joke to them. And so, "If he is a king," they said, "he needs to be dressed like a king!" And so they took an old purple cloak, and they stuck it on him, because purple was the color of kings in those days. It was a kind of color that was so expensive that only the very rich could afford it. So that way they would show this man is a king. "And a king should have a crown," they said. So they fashioned together some thorns and stuck it onto his head. Probably because in those days, kings were almost always depicted as having rays of sunlight coming out from behind their head, kind of like a star behind their head. And so if he is to be a king, then, we'll give him this halo, the thorns spread out in mockery of what a king should be. And a king should be greeted, right? "Hail, King of the Jews!" Just like they said to their own leaders, "Hail, Caesar" or hail anyone in command. And a king needs a scepter right? A symbol of his authority to hold in his hand. And so they laughed as they stuck a reed into his hand and then used it to beat him with. "And a king is someone we should bow before too!" they laughed. And so that's what they did, kneeling before him in a kind of joke homage. They must've been laughing and laughing the whole time, Christians, because this was all a great big joke. Jesus was a joke king. Jesus was a ridiculous king to them. Why? Because they didn't care about him. They were coarse men who enjoyed the suffering of other people, the kind of men who laughed when other people were in pain. And so, the soldiers laughed at Jesus' pain, making him suffer in any way that they could. And they mocked him without pity until they finally took him away to be crucified.

And we can also see what kind of men they are, Christians, by the way they continued to treat him as they took him out to crucify him. Because they laid on Jesus his cross. It was probably just the crossbeam of the cross, the horizontal part of the cross, but that wasn't a light piece of wood. If you can imagine carrying a fence post on your back weighing a hundred pounds, you would have an idea of what Jesus had to suffer. And a hundred pounds would be bad enough if you were feeling great and were in all of your strength, but Jesus has been bloodied and beaten. It's no wonder he can't carry it anymore. But the soldiers don't have any pity for him. They force Simon to carry the cross for him, because they want to get out to where they need to be because they've got business to do. They don't care what Jesus is going through. They don't even care what Simon is going through, for that matter.

And when they get to Golgotha, Christians, before they crucify him, Mark tells us that they gave him wine mixed with myrrh. Now, myrrh was a kind of sedative, the kind of thing that would dull your pain. It might even make you pass out. It was something that made you feel pretty numb. But I doubt that the soldiers gave this to him because they were sorry for him. They probably gave it to him because they didn't want to listen to him as they nailed him to the cross. It's all a cruel joke to them, and they are mocking him every step of the way.

And we see this also with them gambling for Jesus' clothes. They are casting lots to decide who gets to have his clothes, or at least which part of his clothes, all while Jesus is hanging dying on that cross. Because these soldiers don't care about him. They are laughing the whole time. It's all a great big joke. "Who cares," they say, "about this man that they call the King of the Jews?"

But Mark also tells us that it wasn't just the soldiers who treated Jesus this way. It was also the crowds, those who were passing by going into the city. It shows us that Jesus was crucified right next to the road, so that those who were coming into Jerusalem would walk past him as they went. So you can imagine these crowds coming in, seeing Jesus from afar, and sniggering and laughing at what is happening to him as they continue going into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. And they look at Jesus, and they say to him, "You who are so great, you who are so powerful, come down from the cross! You who claim to do the impossible, to destroy the temple and to rebuild it in three days, come down, and we will believe in you." And what probably made that insult even more insulting, Christians, was the fact that Jesus' cross was likely not very tall. I know that in the movies you always see these pictures of these crosses that are huge, right? They're so big that Jesus is hanging over top the heads of the crowd. That's usually how we see it depicted. But for the Romans, that's a waste of wood. That's a lot of work to build a cross that big. So in reality, Jesus' cross was probably not much taller than he was, so that his feet were a foot or less off the ground. Maybe even just a few inches between his toes and the dirt. And so you can hear their mockery: "You who claim to do so much, just come down those two inches! That's all you have to do, and we will believe in you. You're almost there already, Jesus. Just do this one thing, and then we will stop laughing." But they don't, Christians, because they don't care about Jesus. It is all one big joke.

And the council too, the chief priests and the scribes who condemned him to death, are mocking him to one another, talking in that way that people do when they want other people to overhear them. "He saved others," they say. "He did all of these great things, yet he cannot save himself." "He is the king of Israel," they say, mocking him just like the soldiers did. "Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe him." "Let God deliver him if God cares for him," they say. But they don't think that God cares for him at all. They think that Jesus is cursed and that there is no help on the way.

And on and on these jokes go. On and on the laughter goes. On and on the mockery goes, mockery from the world, mockery from the crowds, mockery from those who should've believed in him. Because they all think it's one big joke.

But why, Christians? Why does the world think that the cross of Jesus is a joke? As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18: "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing." The cross is a joke to them, something not worth their attention, something that is totally foolish to them. Because the cross of Jesus seems weak to the world. The cross of Jesus seems foolish to the world. The cross of Jesus seems like a defeat, something not worth paying attention to. The world wants something impressive. The world wants something wise, something amazing, something it can get behind. But the cross of Jesus is none of those things. They want a king who is in command, who can rule over the armies and have victory after victory. But here is Jesus hanging weakly on a cross. They want a king who looks like a king, one in pomp and splendor

and all of those things. But here is Jesus hanging like a criminal by the side of the road on a cross. They want a king who can get things done, who can fight their own battles, who can wage war for them. But here is Jesus, nothing like they expected, nothing like what they think a king should be. And so they treat it as one big joke.

And so should we be surprised, Christians, when the world treats the Word of the cross as a joke? Should we be surprised when the world treats us as foolish for trusting in that cross? Because think of what the world says. The world would say, "Why would you say that about me? Why would you say that I am a sinner? That seems foolish. Why would you say that I have to give up the things of this world? That doesn't make any sense to me. Why would you say that I'm not a good person?" "Look at you!" the world might say. "Look at what kind of Christian you claim to be. You claim to speak for God, and yet this is how you live? Why should I believe anything of what you have to say? I don't want to hear this anymore." And so, Christians, we too, like Jesus, suffer the mockery of the world. We are a joke to those who are perishing. They treat our hope as if it's something shameful, something that we shouldn't even talk about in public. This is why Jesus calls for us to bear our own cross and to follow after him, that we might be crucified with him and suffer all the same things with him. We have become fools, Paul says, a joke for the sake of Christ.

But even though the cross is a joke to the world, Christians, Paul also says, 1 Corinthians 1:18: "To us who are being saved it is the power of God." Because God shows his power in the cross when Jesus died to save us from our sins. God shows his power in the cross by choosing what is foolish to the world so that we would be saved by what he has done alone. Christ became a joke to the world so that we would be brought back to God. And even though the world laughed at him and mocked him and treated him shamefully, yet he endured it all for our sakes so that we would be saved. The cross seems like a joke to the world, Christians, but to us it is our greatest joy. Because through that cross, we have become one with Jesus. Through our own cross, we are being made like him more and more each day. Jesus is saving us through that cross, Christians. So no matter how foolish it seems to the world, to us it is the power of God.

So Christians, do not fear the jokes of the world. The world laughed at Christ. The world will also laugh at us. But even though the cross is a joke to them, hold on to that cross, because through it Jesus has become our salvation. We may be fools to the world, but we are dear to the heart of God.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. We give you thanks for all that you have done in your Son, Jesus Christ, and we praise you forever in his name. In his name we pray. Amen.