

In my office now sits this. Some of you know exactly what this is and some of you may have never seen a real one of these. This is a real milk can. I found this can in my Dad's shop a few weeks ago as I was helping to clean it out while they moved from their home of almost 60 years to a retirement community.

I put this can in my office as a reminder of the dairy farm where I grew up but this can also reminds me of one of the dumbest things I ever did in my life. I still get anxious every time I retell the story of this can.

As a child, one of my responsibilities was to take this can and walk the 100 yards or so down to the farm and retrieve milk for our family from the milk tank. We would milk the cows twice a day and then the milk would go from the cow through a small milk jug and then into a larger tank. It would rest in this tank until the milk truck came to empty the tank and transport the milk to the plant where it would be bottled for sale.

On this one particular occasion my Dad asked me to agitate the milk when I went to retrieve the milk from the milk tank. I realized that I had never done that before. But rather than asking what that meant or asking for directions of how to do that, I made an assumption that I knew what that meant. It was an assumption that would cause a very tragic event to occur.

As I arrived at the barn, I entered the room where the milk tank was located. I had seen this machine over in the corner of the room that I had assumed was the machine that one would use to agitate the milk. It turns out that this machine that I thought was to be used to agitate the milk was, instead, the machine which was used to clean the inside of the milk tank when it was empty. Agitating the milk was simply turning a knob located on the other side of the tank that would stir up the milk with the paddles located inside.

So I pulled the machine over to the valve that I would normally open in order to allow the milk to pour out into the milk can. But I realized that this machine would not fit into the valve that I would normally turn. I did notice that there was a clamp on the valve. I assumed that I would need to remove the clamp in order to insert the machine.

What do you think happened next? When I removed the clamp, it removed the stopper that kept all of this milk inside of the tank. So milk started to pour out of the tank onto the floor of the parlor. As a ten year old boy I tried desperately to put the valve back on the tank. But I didn't have the strength to stop the pressure of the milk. I tried for what seemed like hours but then I panicked. I ran home and told my Dad what had happened. He quickly dashed out the door and ran down to the dairy to stop the milk from pouring out onto the floor.

That tank was our income as a family. The selling of that milk was what paid for my brothers and sisters to attend college that year. It was what paid for the food I ate. It paid the employees that worked for my Dad. And because of my foolishness of not asking a question of clarification when I did not know what to do, I dumped all of that income literally down the drain.

We are in the middle of several weeks of reading through Paul's letters to the Christian church in Corinth. We have learned that the church in Corinth was a troubled church. There was all of this bickering going on between them. They were not a good role model of why having a church is important. Paul writes to them because he started this church and then he writes back to them when he hears about all of their troubles. He tries to give them guidance but he also tries to give them encouragement.

Today's section that we read is one of those places where Paul tries to encourage them. Paul says to these Christians in Corinth who have been harsh to one another that God chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God uses the weak in the world to shame the strong.

My guess is that, like me, you have done some things in your life that as you look back at them you think, man that was a dumb thing I did. Some of us have beaten ourselves down pretty hard because of some foolish things that we have done. And some of us have made mistakes that are pretty bad in our eyes. Some of us are suffering now for recent mistakes.

Maybe you made some poor choices concerning something with your vocation or within your family. Maybe you made a bad choice at some point. Maybe you did something wrong at work that cost your company a lot of money or it maybe cost you your job. Maybe you did something that you knew was wrong and it is eating you up inside. Maybe you feel guilty for something that you have done or for something you left undone. Some of us come into worship today carrying a lot of guilt for one reason or another. Some of us come into worship feeling pretty weak for one reason or another.

But Paul says to the Christians in Corinth that God uses the weak to shame the strong. God uses the foolish to shame the wise.

If you come into worship today feeling weak for one reason or another, hear the voice of God calling out to you. It is you that God is calling to serve. If you come into worship feeling foolish for one reason or another, hear the voice of God calling out to you. It is you that God is calling to serve. Those moments of great foolishness and those moments of greatest weakness can be moments that God uses to do something really important through you.

So rather than looking at your moment of weakness or foolishness as something to be ashamed of or to use as an excuse to beat yourself down, instead ask for the hand of God to use those moments as a witness to the presence of God. Ask God to use your most embarrassing moments and weakest moments as moments to share how grace came through. Ask for God to reveal to you how God can use your most embarrassing and foolish moments as a moment for transformation.

When I returned home after dumping all of that milk, I was a basket case. I could not even stand up I was so distraught. I had dumped all of that milk and all of that income. Like I said, I still cry when I share this story. But my parents never yelled at me. They never punished me. I remember the pain in my mother's face as she took on my pain.

I remember my Dad telling me that it wasn't really all that much milk that dumped down the drain. Yea, right Dad. I know now that he wasn't telling the truth but trying to relieve my guilt. But the response of my parents transformed one of my most foolish acts into one of my moments of greatest grace. I realized then that their love was stronger than any mistakes that I may make in life.

Pray for guidance for how God can use your most foolish and regrettable moments to make something important happen.

Pray for God to find a way to transform something that embarrasses you into something that reveals the presence of God.

Pray for God's Holy Spirit to use your weakness or your foolishness as a moment of God's grace. AMEN.