

A flipped narrative (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

God's son wouldn't be exposed to the heinous death on a cross; he would escape it by using a power given by God.

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What if everything we've ever learned in the world is somehow wrong? The power and wealth we've banked on to measure our lives and those of others. The status and stature, the privilege and position that tell us we've made our way so others will listen to us. The way we use our voice to clear the chatter in the room. The ways we frame our ideas not only as better than most but also as the final judgment on what is good, pure, and just. A future and a hope whose message is good news for only a few in exclusion of the many.

These verses from 1 Corinthians announce that a new day has come. A new measure has been established. Common wisdom, in light of Paul's words, is rendered neither common nor wisdom. The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ topple this narrative and render it obsolete. There is a new manuscript that has at its center a love unlike all others. This love does not limit but is expansive in its scope. All are welcome.

The cross is not reserved for the humiliation and shame of those whose lives have missed the mark. Instead, Paul presents the message of the cross in terms of Jesus, the son of God. In the first century, the idea of God dying would be ridiculous, even impossible. Yet Jesus shows love for the whole creation in ways people haven't imagined. In the ears of those who first heard it read, the story was nothing short of foolish. God's son wouldn't be exposed to the heinous death on a cross; he would escape it by using a power given by God.

Love turns the traditional narrative upside down. Jesus doesn't avoid death. Jesus doesn't evade suffering. Jesus doesn't hang out with the rich and powerful. The message of the cross locates Jesus precisely in the places we wouldn't expect him to be.

This is good news in the world in which we live, where the possibility of purchasing food for those who already could not afford it has become less likely, where people struggle to afford good health care or pay electric bills or their mortgages. In the narratives that have framed our lives in this world, situations like this would seem altogether hopeless. One could even call this narrative God-forsaken.

But the message of the cross is not this. Jesus hangs out with the lost, the hungry, the homeless, the diseased, the uninsured, the imprisoned, the poor, the lonely, and the dead. This narrative is where hope is found, how love is unleashed, and the shape a life takes when love has taken hold. This love shows its power in letting go.