

Utter Foolishness

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on March 7th, 2021 – Exodus 20:1-17, 1 Cor 1:18-25, John 2:12-22)

I am not sure when my fascination with clowns began, it was probably with Zig and Zag, the Peter's ice-cream clowns who with a ukulele sang – “You and me can we be partners, you and I can we be friends, we'll have a great association, one that never ends”. It was their friendly banter, their ability to show all emotions – happy, sad, confused, failure. They seemed so open, friendly and accepting. What followed was years of dressing up as them at superhero balls, kid's birthday parties, community festivals, then came the knitting of jumpers and embroidering clowns on them.



Why the fascination? Clowns make us laugh, they give us permission to cry, their antics are captivating, they liberate our emotions, they give hope that, even the clumsiest of us can achieve.

My favourite type of clown is the Auguste Clown originating in Germany in 1865. This clown exaggerates life – their clothes are all out of proportion – high water pants, short jacket, oversized shoes. They personify imperfection – they fall over, they get up again, they refuse to accept any calamity. There are many other types of clowns – think Charlie Chaplin and the tramp clown.



Clowns might just be a metaphor for the life of faith. Let me explain.

1. Clowns serve – they give of themselves and ask for little in return
 2. Clowns share our moments – rarely do they use words, they convey meaning in actions
 3. Clowns risk being vulnerable – they become a klutz in order to help others think more highly of themselves
 4. Clowns don't place conditions on love – doesn't matter who you are, you are loved by them
 5. Clowns risk rejection – watch them trying to befriend a child who doesn't want to be befriended or who is scared
 6. Clowns are childlike – they express emotions, they accept others, they don't really operate from a place of reason or wisdom
 7. Clowns are authentic – they fail, they laugh, they cry, they are ordinary
 8. Clowns are dreamers – rabbits can come out of hats
 9. Clowns love surprises – how many handkerchiefs do they really have?
 10. Clowns are not afraid to fail – they just pick themselves up and try again.
- Clowns say to the world – you are loved, you make a difference, you are somebody.

Ever since Moses wandered down the mountain with those tablets containing the law which we read about earlier, and probably before, the history of the people of God has

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been dotted with stories of those the world considered fools. Just let your minds wander a little bit. There was a ninety-year old woman who was promised she would have a child, even she thought that foolish and laughed in God's face – but sure enough Isaac was born. Then we have a man who built an enormous boat when there was no sign of rain. Sure enough, it kept the animals and Noah and his family safe when the rain came. Then there was a young boy who fended off an army with a stone and he won. What about the reluctant prophet who didn't want to go to Nineveh but went anyway, even though he travelled in the belly of a fish. Remember the eager young disciple who walked on the water only to nearly drown.

Then there was Jesus.

Jesus, who taught that you should love your enemies, a young man who was a leader but bent down to wash his friend's feet, who consistently broke rules concerning the Sabbath and even caused a riot in the temple by throwing things and people around. In our gospel story, we see Jesus enraged and acting a little foolish. He makes a whip and drives out the animals from the temple, he overturns the tables and pours out the coins of the money changers. He then has a strong word or two to say to the ones who sold doves – get out of here! Not the best way to win friends and influence people. But that is the point, he is not there to make friends and influence others in the worldly sense. It is Passover and people have come to the temple to make their sacrifices as required by the religious law. It appears that Jesus is concerned that the House of God has become a place where the poor are exploited, Jesus singles out those selling doves for his angry words – doves were the cheapest sacrifice and therefore the one poor people could afford. Do you remember in Luke's gospel that when Mary and Joseph present the infant Jesus in the temple, the offering they take with them is a pair of doves?

God's wisdom or foolishness in action. People and worship come before money. It is not okay to put a barrier in the way of people seeking to worship.

Jesus is now named a trouble-maker, they will draw up plans to get rid of him and he will be nailed to the cross.

The cross.

It is precisely this that Paul says is foolishness at least to the Greeks. Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul says that the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world. Preaching Christ crucified is foolishness! The Greeks wanted wisdom and rationality, so instead of a crucified God they would have expected God to send a politically powerful, worldly and wealthy person to lead the people. The Jews looked for signs. A crucified Messiah made no sense to them either. First, crucifixion was a curse. Secondly, a Messiah/Saviour was meant to be an un-suffering saviour. A crucified Messiah was nonsense to them as well.

The crux of Christian faith is not logical, it is not "worldly wise" instead it is good news to those without power – children, the poor, women, the marginalised. Paul then challenges that community to place human wisdom on God's scale; it doesn't even measure up to God's foolishness never lone God's wisdom. God's way is an 'upside down' understanding of life at least compared to the world. This is what we believe though!

Paul challenges the Corinthians and us, later in this letter. to be 'fools for Christ'.

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The cross a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. Yet it is a symbol for us of God's eternal love and life. It is a reminder that God turns the world upside down. What we, and the world think is wise, is perhaps foolish, what we or the world thinks is foolish is perhaps wise. Maybe, we need to understand the world like the clowns of which we spoke earlier.

Being a fool for Christ will mean aiming for higher ethical and spiritual values. It will mean putting people first. It will mean trying to change the world in seemingly impossible situations. It will mean standing up for the vulnerable.

God turns on its head the way we view wisdom and foolishness. Let us go out then as fools for Christ. Let us go out putting people first, even if the world thinks we've gone stark raving mad. That is the way of the cross and the way of our God. Amen.