

God's Clowns

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on February 1st, 2026, (Matthew 5:1-12 & 1 Corinthians 1:18-31))

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Clowns have always fascinated me. I think it began as a child when I would watch two clowns called Zig and Zag.

Zig and Zag – ice cream cones and buckets for hats, a ukelele, a song, a blue dust coat, stripy pants and a polka dot shirt. I loved them and I still know the words of the song they used to sing –

You and me, can we be partners, you and me can we be friends, we'll have a great association, one that never ends.

They were everything clowns should be – silly, happy, sad, clumsy, they showed all kinds of emotions, and they were friends to each other and to the children who watched them. They failed at things and then picked themselves up again. They seemed so ordinary to me, and yet they were extraordinary and I felt like I knew them.



In my twenties, I took to dressing up as a clown. Once I flew to Sydney to be a clown at a friend's toddler's birthday party and another time I wandered Errol Street in North Melbourne during their Spring Fling festival, handing out small treats to children. I had oversized boots, jazzy pants, spotty t shirt (just like Zag), braces, tie, a painted face and wig.

I modelled myself on what was called the Auguste clown. The Auguste clown originated in Germany in 1865. This clown was clumsy, a bit of a klutz. This clown exaggerated everything - dressed in clothing that was all out of proportion – high water pants, short jacket, overlarge shoes, there was nothing perfect about this clown. They would try to do the impossible, but nothing ever worked for them, they would fall over then pick themselves up and try again and again, refusing to accept they couldn't do whatever it is they were attempting. This clown is so human, so real, so fallible but always believes that one day they just might get it right, there is a hopefulness there.



Clowns make people laugh, they give of themselves to make others laugh and feel a bit happier. They rarely use words; they act rather than speak. They share moments with others – moments of joy and sadness. They risk getting close to people, they risk being rejected, they are vulnerable. They accept others and do not put conditions on such acceptance, and they simply ask that others might accept them. By their own clumsy antics, they build the self-esteem of others. They are childlike – they express surprise,

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joy and sadness, they are accepting, they believe in others, they love unconditionally. They are real – they fail, they laugh, they cry. They are dreamers and full of surprises.

Our bible readings today remind me of clowns. They speak of foolishness, of wisdom, of doing things upside down.

In Paul's letter to the church at Corinth he reminds them, and us, 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 was meant to be an un-suffering saviour. So, 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. God's way is an 'upside down' understanding of life at least compared to the world. This is what we believe though, and Paul challenges the Corinthians and us later in this letter to be 'fools for Christ'.

Our gospel reading continues and highlights the 'upside down' nature of the kingdom again. From Matthew's list of those who are blessed we find some surprising entries. We can accept the logic that the righteous and virtuous should be rewarded by God, but it seems illogical that God blesses those who are insignificant – the poor, hungry and weeping. God's wisdom is love and that seems like foolishness the world.

Before Jesus and before Paul wrote his letter there were many fools for God. An old man and woman give birth to a child the call Isaac (which means 'one who laughs'), a man builds a large boat when there is no rain in sight. Another man has a conversation with a burning bush, a young boy beats a giant with a sling shot, another ends up in the belly of a whale, need I go on?

And then Jesus comes along saying crazy things like love your enemies, become like children, sell all your possessions and give to the poor. He tells stories of shepherds leaving their flock to look for one wayward sheep and fathers welcoming back home with a party the son who had just wasted his entire inheritance. And in our reading today tells the crowds that amongst other things that the meek (the lowly, insignificant) will inherit the earth, that those who make for peace will be called children of God, that those who are sad will receive comfort, and that those who get a hard time for believing in Jesus will be rewarded. An upside down, crazy kind of system, at least in the eyes of the world.

Foolish ideas to the world both then and now, but the wisdom of God.

As I look around the world with wars and conflicts abounding, where might seems to call the shots, where democracy is disintegrating before our very eyes, where the rich get richer and the world of IT seems to tear us apart rather than assist us, I think we need some of God's clowns to make an impact in the world. We need some of God's clowns to show the world that they have got it all upside down and what they think is wisdom is utter foolishness and will not serve the people well.

The world needs some clowns of Christ, or God's fools. People who believe in action rather than speaking. People who are authentic and spend their time lifting people up rather than tearing them down. People who will share the joys, sadness and troubles of

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another. People who dare to hope that peace is possible, that the hungry can be fed, that the homeless will find shelter, that the asylum seeker will find welcome and all will receive the love, acceptance and dignity they deserve. People who believe in and will work for justice and mercy for all. People who dare to believe that we are all equal and made in the image of God.

Living out this kind of gospel will appear to the world to be utter foolishness, but to those of us who believe and stake our life on Jesus Christ this is God's wisdom.

Will you join God's troupe of clowns who love unconditionally, put others first, share the joys and sorrows of others, work for peace, show mercy and tell the world that we don't care if they think we are fools? Let us be like an Auguste clown – showing exaggerated love, peace, acceptance and mercy to all we meet.

God's wisdom is foolishness to those who don't want to see.