

July 27, 2025
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"Jesus, the Jester, and Us"

Colossians 2:6-15

We are in the dog days of Summer. So, how about a little bit of lightness with a couple of jokes. What do you get when you cross an elephant and a kangaroo? Big holes all over Australia! I didn't say it was going to be a good joke. How about this one: There were two cows in a field. One said: "Moo." The other one said: "I was going to say that!"

My father-in-law is always sending me jokes so I'll share one he likes to tell. He's also coming next Sunday to lead our music while Renée is away—Benjie is a pianist, composer, and church musician. So this is a good way to bring him up to you. Then I promise there's a point to all of this.

He tells the one about Jesus, Moses, and an old man who are playing golf. They get to a par 3 hole and Jesus is up first. He drives the ball short, into the water trap in front of the green. So Jesus, being Jesus, walks on the water, chips the ball onto the green and putts for par. Moses is next. He drives the ball into the same water trap. So Moses, being Moses, parts the water, chips the ball onto the green, and putts for par. The old man is up. He drives the ball and it's too heading for the water trap. Before the ball lands in the water, a fish jumps out and catches the ball in its mouth. Before the fish lands back in the water, a bird swoops down, snags the fish, and begins to fly away. As it's circling over the green, a bolt of lightning strikes the bird, causing it to drop the fish onto the green. The ball pops out of the fish's mouth, and rolls into the hole for a hole-in-one. Jesus turns to the old man and says, "Dad, if you don't stop fooling around we're not gonna bring you next time."

You may not think that joke is very funny. Scott Weems wrote the book *Ha! The Science of When We Laugh and Why*. He believes that tastes, when it comes to comedy, "vary so widely because humour isn't about setups or punchlines...it's about the 'kick of the discovery', thinking one way and then suddenly turning that thinking around." Dr. Richard Wiseman, a psychologist,

created the website LaughLab which contains over 40,000 jokes, including the ones I started with. He setup the site to take a scientific approach to discovering the world's funniest joke. All the jokes submitted were rated on a 5-point scale by 1.5 million people from around the world.

Now, you didn't know you were going to get this today, but here's one of the top winners: "A man walking down the street sees another man with a very big dog. The man says: 'Does your dog bite?' The other man replies: 'No, my dog doesn't bite'. The first man then pats the dog, who bites his hand, and the man shouts; 'I thought you said your dog didn't bite'. The other man replies: 'That's not my dog'."

Well, it's good to laugh. Now, I'll put my preacher hat back on (I won't quit my day job). There's a long-standing but quiet tradition of seeing Jesus as a clown or a jester archetype. If you're unfamiliar with this, it may sound a bit jarring, but hear me out. The tradition roots itself in Paul's words to the Corinthians which asked them to see how the world views the ways of Christ as "foolish" and that early disciples were to be "fools" for Christ.

When we think about clowns historically, we think of how they were marginalized characters, usually of a lowly societal status—characters who traveled around in caravans and specialized in interruptions and disruptions to the social norms. They were filled with surprises and mocked conventions and the etiquette of the day. Similar were jesters, who used exaggeration, playfulness, and irreverence to tell the truth in the king's court. Both clowns and jesters are absurd characters who critique the kingdom and society, gaining access by their wit and comedy, and always on the side of the people.

From his birth, Jesus was upsetting the "normal" way of things. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus shows up in the most unexpected places, with unexpected people, and defies expectation wherever he goes. Many times his technique was to use exaggeration to create a disruption to the usual way of thinking. For instance, in Matthew he says, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye?" [7:3] This would have been comedy gold. It likely even got a laugh from original hearers.

If you have a hard time seeing this sort of characterization for Jesus, maybe it would help to do a mental exercise: think about some of the counter-cultural sayings and actions of Christ, then imagine him doing jazz hands at the punch line. It could go something like this: "You heard it said, 'An eye for an eye

and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you: If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also [jazz hands]... and if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give your coat as well [jazz hands]... and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile [jazz hands]. I don’t intend to be irreverent here but I think that’s the whole point. Jesus was provocative even to the point of holy irreverence.

We’ve become so familiar with these sayings that we have trouble conceiving their disruptive nature, maybe even their comedy. We’ve lost the sheer absurdity of it. St. John Chrysostom, the early Church Father, defined a fool as “one who is slapped.” By this definition, Jesus in this passage, is asking his followers to be fools for him to counter the ways of the world, which saw retaliation as the expected response, by instead foolishly giving of oneself.

There is no greater example of this than his own crucifixion in which Jesus gives his last breath to pray for his enemies. How foolish! Yet, how immensely beautiful! You see, crucifixion is not just a tragedy but a parody. All crucifixions at the time were considered ironic punishments: For those who raised themselves above their social level, they were mimicked and parodied by being “exalted” in this strange form of public execution. It was like a cruel mirror being held up to their own pretensions and self-elevation. Jesus’s crucifixion was parodied even further—clothing him with the garb of royalty, giving him a crown but made of thorns, mocking him by calling him king.

Yet it was not the Romans who had the last laugh; Jesus, the holy trickster, upends expectation in his greatest punch line, the resurrection—when he plays a joke on death itself (“insert jazz hands”). I wasn’t preaching in a pulpit on Easter Sunday 2018, but that day Easter unusually fell on April Fool’s Day. Talk about a softball pitch! Many preachers, I imagine talked about the resurrection as God’s great April Fool’s joke—a reversal that transformed creation. For centuries in early Greek Christian tradition, they celebrated “Bright Sunday” or “Holy Humor Sunday” on the Sunday after Easter. It was a time of celebration marked by joy and laughter. This must strike us—and even more, those looking on—as nothing but ironic, even foolish, to observe such a festive celebration where there should be mourning and grief.

In our passage this morning, it says: “When you were dead in trespasses, God made you alive. By this, the record was erased that stood against us

with its legal demands. God set this aside, nailing it to the cross and so disarmed the rulers and authorities, making a public example of them and triumphing over them in it.” The story of salvation is God’s great reversal, a holy trick, if you will—that according to the law and the way of the world, we should stand accused, condemned, even crucified, but instead those demands are themselves nailed to the cross and mocked publicly. This is God’s refusal to accept the limits of the world, just as a clown refuses to fall in line with the expected.

In this passage to the Colossians, it says: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him. *Rooted* is an agricultural term and *built up* is an architectural term. From top to bottom, in all the ways we are put together, we are to mirror Christ in the world. This morning, I wanted to add to our imaginaries this idea of Christ as the great comedian, a disruptive clown, a jester in the court of empire, a holy trickster, to remind us of our calling to the absurd. To remember the outrageous foolishness of self-giving love in a world dominated by fear and ego.

To be a holy fool is our vocation. It is a mission of mockery. The meek inherits the earth, that’s foolish. The first will be last, makes no sense.

So, too, a good Samaritan...
...the poor who are blessed,
...loving one’s enemies,
...a king who washes feet,
...becoming a servant to be great,
...a crucified savior,
...or a cross as a coronation.

Foolish, senseless... and yet a deep wisdom that transforms us.

In 1 Corinthians [1:26-29] it says: “Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to abolish things that are.”

Dear Siblings, when you are expected to tense up your fists and fight the world’s way, show `em your *jazz hands*—that is your greatest punch line.

If you'll allow me to use this language: We are God's greatest joke today, a walking paradox, a living riddle, to the extent that we put on the *Imago Dei* (the image of Christ).

Not a joke to be laughed at... but living interruptions of holy wisdom, that infuse our world with that "kick of the discovery" wherever we go.

May we remember how right it is to be found clowning around.

Amen.