

## A Fool's God

You probably know, or should know, that you are all foolish people.

You are here to say thank you to a God who is, putting it simply, a fool's God.

Just listen to the readings today.

It's all foolishness.

Take the letter to Titus, ..... please!

It says that our best efforts don't amount to a hill of beans when it comes to getting right with God.

It says the tried and true gold standard, that folks get what they deserve, is out the window!

It says that God has done all the work for us, not because we are sweet and adorable, but simply because God is pleased to bring us home.

And what about that foundation of all human wisdom?

You know: tit for tat, getting what you deserve, karma?

All of it gets tossed out the window, according to the letter to Titus.

"When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy." Titus 3:4.

Jump forward to the gospel lesson that Mother Imelda somehow managed to get through with a straight face!

Look at the scene!

Here's a pregnant, unwed, teenager, a nobody in her own town, a pariah in her own culture because she's unmarried and pregnant, who gives birth in a barn.

She's surrounded by her bewildered fiancé, a bunch of shepherds (the 1st century version of a motorcycle gang) and livestock!

Just last week we all listened in as she starts hollering about how God, through this unwed, pregnant, ragamuffin, is scattering the proud and lifting up bums and giving food to empty stomachs – all the while telling those who have it all -- to get lost!

Saturday Night Live couldn't come up with something more ridiculous!

So where is all of this going?

Or more to the point, where is all of this **taking us**, and our sound judgment and our well-reasoned common sense?

After weeks of Advent darkness, in the miracle that is Christmas, God says:

“Lighten up!”

And if we do, we might discover that same sigh of relief discovered by the old philosopher who came to see that:

“God is a really just a comedian, playing to an audience too scared to laugh.”

In the heart of a cruel Roman occupation in Mary's day; in our world of endless violence, in a culture that tells us all our worries can be cured by shopping, the holy fool comes to be born in a barn....

Go figure!

Now, if you think maybe I was hitting the eggnog while preparing this sermon, if you think it's disrespectful to call the God of all that is “foolish,” well, there's a long history to doing just that.

Did you know that “throughout medieval and early modern Europe, Christmas was a time for a party called “The Festival of Fools,” which began as early as the ninth century, when a mock Patriarch was elected in Constantinople, when the Eucharist was turned into vaudeville and the holy priests rode through the streets backwards – on donkeys.

In 1685, in the Franciscan Church of Antibes, lay people wore the priest's vestments inside out, held the books upside down ... wore eyeglasses made of orange peels, blew incense ashes on each others' faces, and instead of the proper liturgy – hollered out with gibberish.” E.K. Chambers.

And all of this was done not to mock God, but to mock tired and tedious human pretension.

But it goes back even farther.

The foolishness of God is the very seed that begins everything.

All the way back to Abraham and Sarah, two decrepit oldsters who listen to the folly of God's invitation, leaving their hometown for parts unknown.

Along the way, Sarah is promised a son, even though her insides are all dried up...and when the promise is made...she laughs!

When that son is finally born, lo and behold, they name him Laughter, pronounced in Hebrew: Isaac.

The comedy continues when God chooses the Jews to be his holy people.

It's said that to be Jewish is to be just like other people, only more so.

Think Jewish mothers and Jewish lawyers.

And so it goes, as we will see throughout the coming year, in the outrageous stories Jesus tells that turn expectations upside down, leaving his listeners to either laugh or cry....

It is St. Paul who sums up so well the fool's errand you are on if you choose to follow the Way of Jesus Christ.

"It seems to me that God has put us who bear his Message on stage in a theater in which no one wants to buy a ticket.

We're something everyone stands around and stares at, like an accident in the street.

We're the Messiah's misfits.

**You** might be sure of **yourselves**, but **we** live in the midst of frailties and uncertainties.

You might be well-thought-of by others, but we're mostly kicked around.

Much of the time we don't have enough to eat, we wear patched and threadbare clothes, we get doors slammed in our faces, and we pick up odd jobs anywhere we can to eke out a living.

When they call us names, we say, "God bless you."

When they spread rumors about us, we put in a good word for them." 1 Cor. 4:9-13. (The Message Tr.)

Signing on with this Jesus is as silly as an unwed teen seeing the world turned upside down because of a child laying in a food trough; it's as crazy as a crucified king!

This Christmas morning, look at your hands.

In one, we hold our good common sense, our logical approach to the problems of the world - and in the other hand - holding nothing -- we are offered God's hand, full of laughter and craziness and a world turned upside down.

Christmas is here my fellow fools!

Let us be glad, and rejoice!

+amen