

fools for Christ



creative resources for Lent and Eastertide

*Worship tools with a peace and justice emphasis from Seeds of Hope Publishers,
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Creative Worship Tools

from

Seeds Publishers

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Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group intends to seek out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable, and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

Editorial Address

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art by Sharon Rollins

a word about this packet

These materials are offered to you on clean, unattached pages so that you can more easily photocopy anything you wish to duplicate. We are constantly looking for ways to make the pages more attractive and easier for you to photocopy. Feel free to copy any of this, including art, and adapt these tools to your needs.

The art on the cover, along with several other pieces of art dealing with fools, was created especially for you by Sally Lynn Askins, a costume and design professor at Baylor University. Other pieces were created by returning artists: Lenora Mathis, a student at Austin College in Sherman, Texas; Sharon Rollins, a counselor in Waco, Texas; and Rebecca Ward, a student at Midway High School in Woodway, Texas.

In pulling together ideas about *Godspell* themes and sets, we received creative ideas and instructions from Sally Lynn Askins, John Ballenger, Tim Haynes, and Sharon Rollins.

The material in this packet is your congregation's to use freely. We have tried to pull together creative and inspiring resources that you can use to raise awareness of issues surrounding economic justice and food security (especially from a biblical perspective) in your congregation. We endeavored to choose a variety of age groups, worship areas, events, and angles, so that you would have a potpourri of art and ideas from which to choose.

We make a conscious effort to maintain a balance between the apostolic and the contemplative—on the one hand, the dynamic challenge to stay true to God's mandate to feed the poor and struggle for justice, and on the other hand, our own compelling need for nurture and healing while we work toward those dreams.

For more on how we have tried to "flesh out" our theme, see the brainstorming session on page 3.

A Brainstorming Session

from editors and friends

Nancy Sehested says that worship provides us with the opportunity to try on God's vision for humanity:

Our vocation is to weave in and out among the people and listen and see how it is that God's life is bubbling up in the everyday lives of these human beings that we are privileged enough to walk alongside. I think our best task is to weave in and out and keep listening and listening until we see God breaking through and then say, "Aha! God is here." We lift it up and say, "Did you see it? Here it is. Your story is alive with God. Rejoice in that, take comfort in that, be disturbed by that. Be creative with that. Imagine a different world with that."

So we try to keep our worship alive. We try to tell the story that we've all heard a million times in a fresh way so that someone will suddenly wake up and say, "Aha! God is here." For this packet we have chosen the theme of the foolishness of God, of Christ, and of the Christian life.

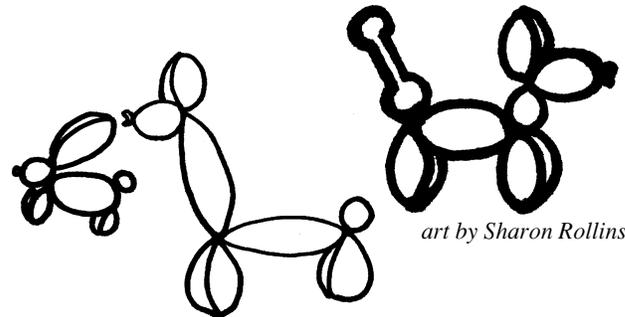
I am reminded of the *eldila*, the frightening messenger figures in C.S. Lewis's *Space Trilogy*; they appeared as rods of light. They sometimes didn't show up as exactly vertical, but Lewis writes that one sensed that it was the world, not they, which was out of alignment. That's the idea we are trying to get across here. Buechner's "Mad Tea Party" description of the Last Supper. Lunacy as the world sees it.

In *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, the 1972 movie about Francis of Assisi, the character Paulo—who is totally opposed to everything Francesco has done since his conversion—says to Bernardo de Quintavalle, "Listen to me; Francesco's not mad." Almost as an aside, he says, "He may be very sane indeed." Then he continues, "But we simply have nothing in common any more. You cannot afford to be associated with him; none of us can." Which conveys the way the world sees these fools for Christ.

So how do we convey this theme? We have gathered together a number of ways to present the absurdity and scandal that we are supposed to be living.

Charley Garrison, a pastor in Waco, Texas, sent us a wonderful service for the Sunday before April 1 ("Holy Fools Day" they call it) that is filled with holy foolishness. It is taken from *And Everyone Shall Praise: Resources for Multicultural Worship* by R. Mark Liebenow. It starts out by saying:

Come, you who are tired of holding the world together.



art by Sharon Rollins

Come, you who are weary of trying to make life make sense.

Come, you who want to dance but can't find the time. And come, you who are too busy to care for people.

At one point in the service congregants are instructed to make their favorite animal from the Bible using balloons. Charley wrote that stores like Hobby Lobby have pumps and balloons and instructions on how to make balloon animals. He went on to say that he has "a wonderful cross that hangs around the neck. The top comes off, and it's a wand for blowing soap bubbles! I always keep it with my vestments, filled with soap and ready if I think things are getting too heavy."

We have drawn together images and activities inspired by fools from ancient cultures, from the medieval Feast of Fools, from the sophisticated Elizabethan jester, and from the more recent theology of play movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the U.S. We have adapted and interpreted themes from Stephen Schwartz's *Godspell*—probably our era's most pervasive offering of the "Christ-Clown" literary figure—for Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday.

All of this is couched in the biblical passages that describe the topsy-turvy nature of the reign of God, the backward ways that Jesus chose to do things, Paul's description of the foolishness of God:

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. (1 Corinthians 1:27)

or, as Eugene Peterson puts in *The Message*:
Human wisdom is so tiny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can't begin to compete with God's 'weakness.'

Some of this may appear to be pretty absurd, and you may even suspect that we've been smoking banana peels in the Seeds office. But that's the whole point. As Archie Bunker would say, "It ain't supposed to make sense; it's faith."—lkc

bulletin art

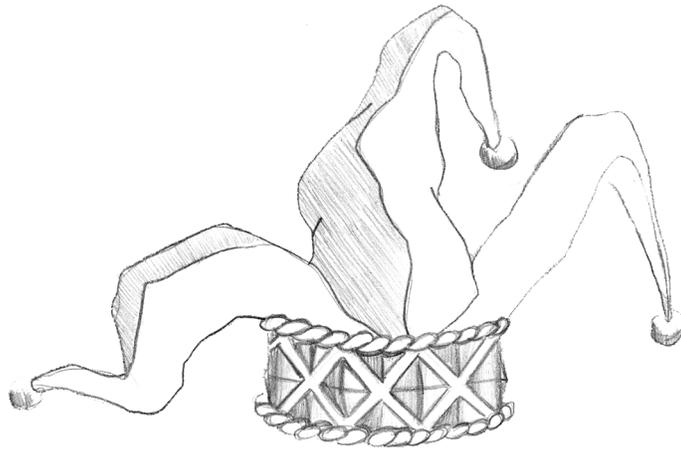
"But God chose what is foolish



**in the world to shame the wise;
God chose what is weak in the
world to shame the strong;"**
1 Corinthians 1:25

bulletin art

art by Sally Lynn Askins



**"Human wisdom is so tiny, so
impotent, next to the seeming
absurdity of God. Human
strength can't begin to compete
with God's 'weakness.'"**

1 Corinthians 1:25 (The Message)

bulletin art



Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of the "brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions of the "somebodies"?

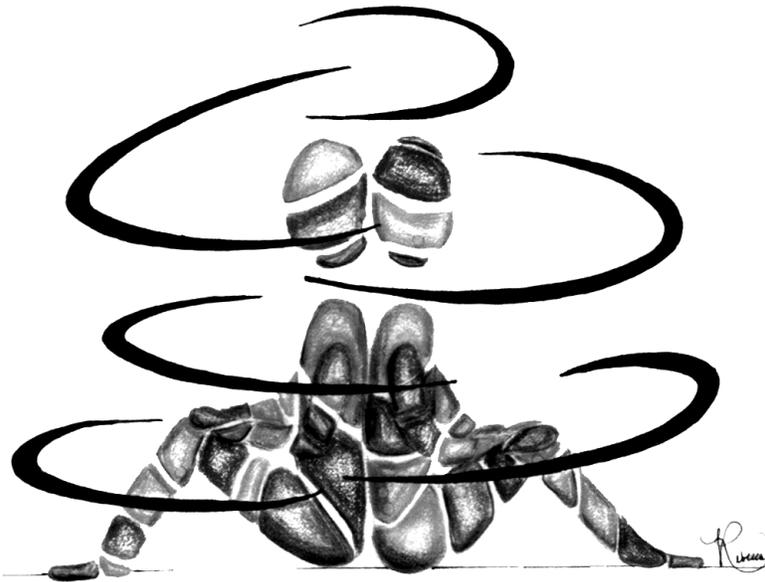
1 Corinthians 1:26-28,

The Message

art by Sally Lynn Askins

bulletin art

art by Rebecca Ward



If the world is sane, then Jesus is mad as a hatter and the Last Supper is the Mad Tea Party. The world says, Mind your own business, and Jesus says, There is no such thing as your own business. The world says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus says, Follow me and be crucified. The world says, Drive carefully—the life you save may be your own—and Jesus says, Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The world says, Law and order, and Jesus says, Love. The world says, Get and Jesus says, Give. In terms of the world's sanity, Jesus is as crazy as a coot, and anybody who thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is laboring less under a cross than under a delusion.

*—Frederick Buechner,
The Faces of Jesus*

Ashes and foolishness: an ash wednesday service for youth and other imaginative people

by Katie Cook
(with lots of help)

This service, like the Maundy Thursday service in this packet, borrows heavily from the 1972 movie *Godspell*. It is designed to complement the Maundy Thursday service—sort of like bookends.

In order to understand most of what is going on here, you might want to rent the movie and watch it before Lent begins. (You will need to ask your group or congregation to watch it before Holy Week, in preparation for the Maundy Thursday service.) We have also suggested music from the soundtrack. (If you can find someone who was in college in the early 1970s, chances are they'll have a copy of the soundtrack from the movie or the Broadway musical. If not, you can substitute your own ideas for music.)

There are several ways you can prepare the worship space for both of these services. Theatrical director and designer Tim Haynes suggests, for a creative Lenten theme, a sanctuary that looks like it is under construction—with yellow tape scaffolding, paint buckets, and other implements of building or remodeling.

Another theatrical designer (and *Seeds* artist), Sally Lynn Askins, suggests a skyline of your city as a backdrop. Hers was made of plexiglass. You may want to leave some of this throughout Lent as a visual theme interpretation.

Here's another idea: Sally Lynn suggests (if you have the time and resources) a stage floor in the shape of a cross. She

says that, for a *Godspell* show she designed in Dallas, she actually constructed a runway in the shape of a cross that came out into the audience. You could perhaps use rugs or cloth to bring out the effect of a cross. However, if your group is small, you might simply arrange the chairs in a circle. If your group is large, you may want to divide them into several circles for the imposition of ashes.

Sally Lynn says that, for the original *Godspell* setting, Stephen Schwarz used a children's playground. Following this theme, you could place toys or playground equipment around the room.

You will need a basket of very small toys—more than enough for each congregant. As the people arrive, ask each one to pick a toy take it to his or her seat. (A variation of this would be to give each one a plastic Easter egg—the kind that you can put things in.) Don't tell them yet what it is for.

You will need a tape or CD player (or maybe even a phonograph...) You will need to assign the scripture readings beforehand.

If you give out plastic eggs instead of toys, ask the people to take them and bring them back on Easter Sunday with something in them that represents resurrection. In either case, you may want to schedule a time for people to share with each other about this process. Why did they pick what they picked? What has God taught them through this?—lkc

Order of Worship

Invocation

LEADER: Almighty and everlasting God, we come before you as children, for Jesus your son once said that we should become as children. So on this day of ashes we strive to be solemn as only a child can be. God of mercy, create in our spirits a freshness, that we may hear your word with new ears. May we see our mortality and our tendency to fall with new eyes. May we be transformed from our wise and worldly lives into a new audacity in Christ. Amen.

Meditation

If the world is sane, then Jesus is mad as a hatter and the Last Supper is the Mad Tea Party. The world says, Mind your own business, and Jesus says, There is no such thing as your own business. The world says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus says, Follow me



art adapted from a 1970s *Godspell* poster

and be crucified. The world says, Drive carefully—the life you save may be your own—and Jesus says, Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The world says, Law and order, and Jesus says, Love. The world says, Get and Jesus says, Give. In terms of the world’s sanity, Jesus is as crazy as a coot, and anybody who thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is laboring less under a cross than under a delusion.

—Frederick Buechner, *The Faces of Jesus*

Scripture

Matthew 5:1-11

Music

“Day by Day” from Godspell

Invitation into Lent

LEADER: Dear people of God, the first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord’s passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time for reflection, confession, and a restoration of fellowship within the church. It became a time for all Christians to renew their covenant with God and to strengthen their faith.

I invite you therefore, in the name of the universal Body of Christ, to the observance of a holy Lent: to self-examination, prayer, fasting, self-denial, and to reading and meditating on God’s word. And now, to make an appropriate beginning of Lent and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now receive the mark of ashes.

Imposition of Ashes

LEADER: We are frail dust. Our lives often crumble into ashes. We sometimes live as we ought to, but many times we do not. By the wearing of these ashes, we proclaim that God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; and God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. *Here each participant takes ashes and makes the mark of a cross on the forehead of the person to his or her left, saying the following words:*

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

Scripture

Matthew 5: 13-16

Music

“Light of the World” from Godspell

Litany

LEADER: Most holy and merciful Creator, we confess to you and to one another that we have made mistakes and acted selfishly in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

PEOPLE: Loving God, we confess these things to you.

LEADER: We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

PEOPLE: Lord Jesus, show us how to love.

LEADER: We have been deaf to your call to serve others as Christ served us. We have not been true to the teachings of Christ.

PEOPLE: Lord Jesus, show us how to follow you.

LEADER: We have been self-indulgent. We have exploited other people for our own comfort.

PEOPLE: Lord, help us to live with others in mind.

LEADER: We have polluted your creation, not thinking of those who come after us.

PEOPLE: Lord, give us a love and respect for your creation.

LEADER: We have been dishonest, even to ourselves, and judgmental of others who may be different.

PEOPLE: Lord, open our eyes and hearts to the truth.

LEADER: We have forgotten to spend time with you.

PEOPLE: Lord, bring us back into your presence.

LEADER: Lord, at times we have taken ourselves too seriously and have become too dignified to experience joy any more.

PEOPLE: Lord Jesus, bring us back to life.

LEADER: Bring us close to you, to walk with you in newness.

PEOPLE: Restore the joy of our salvation.

LEADER: Show us how to throw off our stiffness and become holy fools.

PEOPLE: And bring us through these weeks to truly know the meaning of resurrection.

Scripture

Matthew 6:19-21

Music

“Save the People” from Godspell

Instruction

LEADER: You are holding in your hand a toy that you chose from the basket as you entered. You chose that toy for some reason. Take it with you and ponder these questions: Why did I choose this toy? Is there something it can tell me about myself or my relationship to God?

Benediction

LEADER: In the wearing of these ashes, may we go forth from here into the observance of a holy Lent. During these weeks, may we learn to throw off the cultural stigma that holds us back from truly following Jesus. May we find wonder and joy in the foolishness of God. May we be transformed, even for just a moment, into fools for Christ.

Amen.

Fools for Christ: a sermon

by Kathlyn R. James

*Texts: Isaiah 29:13-19
I Corinthians 1:18-31*

There is a long history of the interpretation of the Christian life, especially in our Protestant tradition, that says: to be a good Christian is to be socially respectable. Many of us grew up on that idea. But there is another interpretation of what it means to be a Christian, one that has an even longer history. It is the tradition of the holy fool.

This tradition finds its biblical roots in the writings of Paul, who says, in I Corinthians 4, “We are fools for the sake of Christ.” What he means is that, for the sake of the gospel, he has given up all claims to social respectability. He has given up his status as a pious, propertied, and well-educated Jew, and has chosen a path that his former friends and colleagues can only view as utter foolishness.

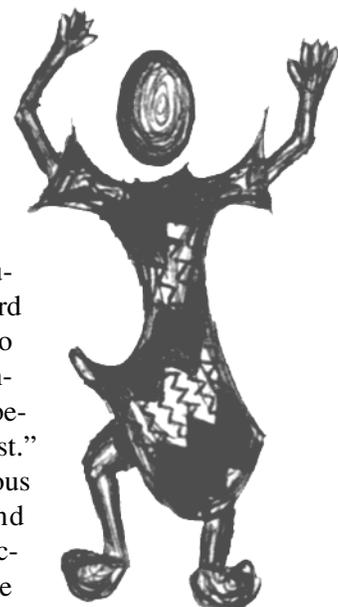
Paul has done this, he says, in imitation of Jesus, who, even though he had the status of God, “emptied himself and took the form of a servant,” spending his life not among the best and the brightest people, but among the least and the lost. Not only this, he “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” Such is the foolishness of God! Paul says. It defies conventional wisdom so thoroughly that it “becomes a stumbling block

What Paul means is that, for the sake of the gospel, he has given up all claims to social respectability. He has given up his status as a pious, propertied, and well-educated Jew, and has chosen a path that his former friends and colleagues can only view as utter foolishness.

to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles.” In today’s lesson, Paul writes:

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

This passage has captured the religious imagination of Christians through the centuries. And some have heard in it a special calling to represent God’s foolishness to the world, by becoming “fools for Christ.” They appear in the various guises of jesters and clowns, madmen and eccentrics, woven into the tapestry of Christian history like some wild red thread.



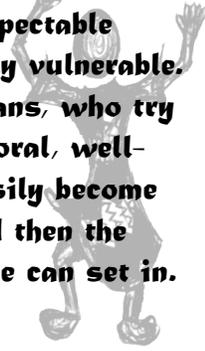
art by Rebecca Ward

It is in the branch of Christianity known as Eastern Orthodoxy that the notion of holy foolishness has been taken to its most extreme. The Orthodox fool appears not only as someone who has stepped out of the mainstream of society, but quite literally as a lunatic. There’s St. Simeon Salos, for instance (*salos* means “fool” in Greek), a 6th Century monk who pursued a career of feigned madness. His exploits include running through the streets while dragging a dead dog, ducking into bathhouses reserved for women, and disrupting worship by throwing nuts to extinguish the candles on the altar (let’s not try that here!). All the while, unbeknownst to others, Simeon practiced prayer and fasting.

Or there’s St. Andrew, the Fool of Constantinople, who lived in the 12th Century. Receiving a divine call to feigned insanity, Andrew spent most of his life naked, both in winter and in summer, often sleeping out-of-doors with stray dogs. As a troublesome beggar who angered respectable citizens, he shared his time with the outcasts on the skirts of the city, in perpetual prayer.

From 16th Century Russia come tales of the *yurodivye*, (which means “fools for Christ”), who wandered about with iron collars about their necks, pilfering trinkets from shops and decrying the oppression of the poor. The most venerated of these was Basil the Blessed, who threw stones at the houses of substantial citizens and bathed sinners with his tears.

Holy fools try to keep us from taking ourselves too seriously. This is a liability to which respectable Christians are particularly vulnerable. We mainstream Christians, who try so hard to be decent, moral, well-mannered people, can easily become stuffy and stiff. And then the spiritual infection of pride can set in.



For those of us in the West, there are stories from Ireland of St. Moling, who loved the unlovable, and kept a fox and a fly as companions. But the most famous holy fool is probably St. Francis of Assisi, who gave up all his possessions, identified himself with beggars and lepers, and enjoyed a wild rapport with all living things.

For Francis, perfect joy was to be found in the poverty of social ostracism and contempt. With a sense of his vocation as a kind of guerrilla theater, he upset everyone by preaching on the nakedness of Christ while standing naked in the pulpit (let's pass on that one, too!). Francis understood his calling as a special gift from God, given for the good of all believers.

What in the world are these holy fools, appearing in every age and every country, trying to tell us about what it means to be a Christian? As I have immersed myself this week in reading about these bizarre characters, at least two possibilities have come to mind.

The first is this: Holy fools try to keep us from taking ourselves too seriously. This is a liability to which respectable Christians are particularly vulnerable. We mainstream Christians, who try so hard to be decent, moral, well-mannered people, can easily become stuffy and stiff. And then the spiritual infection of pride can set in.

We start to look down our noses at others, especially people who are "not like us." We become condescending toward those whose lives, in our estimation, are not as virtuous or "spiritual" as our own. But self-righteousness can have not only irritating, but even dangerous, consequences. As history has proven time and again, when we start to believe that someone else—or a whole group of people—are not like us, but somehow morally inferior, we can start to justify all kinds of sins against them.

In the gospels, Jesus sometimes plays the holy fool for exactly this reason. Like a clown in white face, he mimics the Pharisee standing on the street corner, praying, "I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner, like other people." The people listening to Jesus must have smiled at that

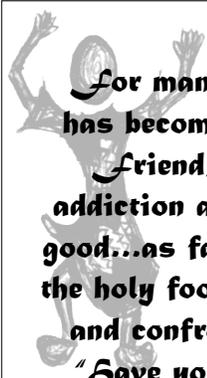
(although, you remember, the Pharisees didn't think it was so funny). "I thank you that I am not like other people"—what a ridiculous thing to say! Of course the Pharisee, with his precious image of himself, is like other people. Embarrassingly so.

This is one function of holy fools: prick the balloon of pride in religious folks, and bring us down to earth. With their buffoonery, they work against the tendency we all have to construct our identities around our own efforts to be good, or the expectations and admiration of others, rather than around the immense and merciful love of God. There is a second thing that holy fools do. They shock us out of our habituated sense of how things "ought to be." Just when we think we know where to look for meaning, just when we think we've learned to identify God's presence and God's will in this world, holy fools come along and turn everything upside down.

For instance, we may think that religion has to do with the development of self-esteem, enhanced relationships, or inner healing. For many of us in this culture, God has become therapeutic, the comforting Friend, the Counselor who cures addiction and dysfunction. And this is good...as far as it goes. But along come the holy fools, smelling bad, acting crazy, and confronting us with the question, "Have you domesticated God, and so defined the spiritual life, that its practice is simply the pursuit of the pleasant? Doesn't spirituality also involve discomfort, confusion, even pain?"

Or perhaps we think that religion has to do with the kind of worldly wisdom that counsels us to lead with our strengths and hide our weaknesses. We don't like our weaknesses, after all. Why parade them? Then along come the clowns, making fools of themselves, acting out the parts of our own selves that are too embarrassing and humiliating to even claim. But wait, they say. What if it is precisely in accepting that which is distasteful and cast out—both in ourselves and in other people—that human beings become whole? And what if, ironically, God enters us and works through us, as often through our weaknesses as through our strengths?

Or this: Perhaps we think that religion has to do with rewarding good behavior and punishing that which is bad. Our God is the God of judgments that are right and fair. Then along come the clowns, sleeping with stray dogs and eating with sinners, with the hardest message of all. God is a fool, then, they say. Common sense would tell you that it's foolish to believe in people who keep on disappointing you. It is foolish to give to the ungrateful, or forgive those who don't deserve it. It is absolutely foolish to make yourself vulnerable to people who have hurt you and will hurt you again, even break your heart! But that is exactly what God does, again and again and again.



For many of us in this culture, God has become therapeutic, the comforting friend, the Counselor who cures addiction and dysfunction. And this is good...as far as it goes. But along come the holy fools, smelling bad, acting crazy, and confronting us with the question, "Have you domesticated God, and so defined the spiritual life, that its practice is simply the pursuit of the pleasant?"

I want to tell you a story about that. It's a personal story; some of you have heard it before. I share it today because it says so much about the power of holy foolishness. It happened seven years ago, when I had been appointed to my previous church, Lake Washington United Methodist, for less than a year. I walked into my living room one day, and my sixteen-year-old daughter was waiting for me, with the news: "Mom, I'm pregnant." At that moment, my world caved in. But after Eve and I had cried together, prayed together, and sought counseling together, the decision was made. She would have the baby; they would live with me, and I would help as much as I could.

I decided to inform my congregation by means of a letter, in which I explained the situation and simply asked for their prayers. The letter went out on a Thursday morning. That Sunday, when I came to church, I tried to be prepared for whatever the fallout might be. That day also happened to be my 40th birthday, and as I walked into the church I was surprised (and a little appalled, I admit) by what was on the altar: there were birthday candles instead of regular candles, and handfuls of confetti scattered all over the place. I thought: this is not liturgically correct! But I didn't want to be ungracious, so I didn't say anything.

The worship service began. I preached as usual. But when I finished, a member of the Staff/Parish Relations Committee stood up and walked to the pulpit. Oh no, I thought. This was the person who had said to me earlier, "I don't see how we can continue to have your family stay in the parsonage. You are supposed to set an example for the rest of us." I thought he might even be coming forward to call for my resignation. I held my breath.

This person took the microphone, and proceeded to announce that 40 is supposed to be the beginning of wisdom, and that he, for one, wanted to say that he thought I was a wise woman, and he was glad to have me as his

pastor. I couldn't believe my ears. He held out a gift, the stole I am wearing today. But that was just the beginning.

Because after that the choir stood up—which was not in the order of worship—and began to sing this wonderful funny song that goes on and on, putting the words "Happy Birthday" to various famous tunes. "Happy birthday to you!" "Happy Birthday, Kathlyn, Happy Birthday." I thought: this is not very dignified. This shouldn't be happening in a worship service! And I sat there, totally embarrassed.

But even that wasn't the end. When the choir sat down, suddenly the back door of the church crashed open and a band of mariachis came running in, shouting, "Ay Ay Ay!" They led the congregation in the Mexican birthday song, "Las Mananitas," which had been printed, I later discovered, in everyone's bulletin except mine. As they sang, members of the congregation came up, one by one, to place a carnation in my arms. Finally I was standing there holding 40 carnations, blinking back tears, and thinking, "All this attention shouldn't be focused on me! I hope there aren't any visitors here today. They might think we are a cult or something."

It was only as I stood there, receiving those flowers, that it hit me what was really going on. This wasn't about my 40th birthday. It was the Sunday after my letter had gone out, the Sunday on which I had come to church fearful of being condemned—and instead, the congregation was offering an extravagant gesture of grace. The whole thing—candles and confetti, music and mariachis—was one grand outpouring of holy foolishness. In the high tradition of the holy fools, the congregation was embodying, to me and my family, the outrageous, unmerited love of God.

I want to add a postscript to that story. Today, seven years later, my daughter is married, has a second child, and is completing her junior year of college. This is the daughter who resented church, for many years, because of the time and attention I have given to church work, sometimes to the detriment of my family. You know what happened, as a result of that crazy worship service? My daughter, who had been so alienated, came back to church. She drives clear across town to be there, now, every Sunday, with her two sons by the hand. All because of that high holy party that was thrown at a low point in our lives, when we came to church fearing judgment, and received grace.

Such is the foolishness of God, which is wiser than the wisdom of the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

—*This sermon was preached by Rev. Dr. Kathlyn James in February of 2001 at the First United Methodist Church where she serves as pastor, and is used with her permission.*

Note: Until his twentieth year, Giovanni “Francesco” Bernadone, who is known to us as St. Francis of Assisi, was a lighthearted reveler—generous of nature, but generally unconcerned with the serious matters of life. Then, in 1202, the city-state of Assisi was involved in a border dispute with nearby Perugia. Francis, son of a wealthy merchant, and his noble-born friends fitted themselves with splendid armor and set forth to do battle as the “pride of Assisi.” Francis, who led a group of lancers in a disastrous assault on the bridge at San Giovanni (halfway between the two warring cities), was taken prisoner. In the Perugia prison for an undetermined length of time—several months, probably—he contracted a deadly fever and was released. Somehow, despite his illness and delirium, he found his way on foot back to Assisi. There he began a long recovery process in which no one knew whether he would live or die.

After Francis recovered from his fever, he acted strangely: he was preoccupied with the sun; he wandered through the meadows, talked to birds and beasts, embraced peasants, and generally abhorred the life of luxury he had once loved. One by one many of his friends began to understand what he meant and what he now saw. Several of them took on the tonsure of penance and the humble shepherd’s robe. The established society of the thirteenth century thought them to be mad; many still do.

Divine Madness

The pride of Assisi,
strong young men:
virile,
attractive,
witty,
accustomed to taking
what they want.

“Keep from us the ugly sights,”
they say;
“Only the pretty
and the clean,
Only the best
and the finest,
Is good enough for us.

Keep from us the lepers,
the dirty,
the disfigured.
We do not want to see them.”

Until a fever breaks through
the demonic madness
And leaves their leader
Sane.
With the wisdom of the world
a-kilter
They are once again aligned
with the center
of the universe.



The above is the second in a group of twelve meditations written by Katie Cook, called “Songs for the Little Flowers.” They were inspired by The Little Flowers of Saint Francis, a book of stories told by contemporaries of St. Francis.

what the wounds are for...

*Soul of Christ, sanctify me,
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me,
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me,
Within thy wounds, I pray.
Within thy wounds, I pray.
Amen.
—from the Anima Christi*



I stopped preaching when I started having doubts about the resurrection. And I started having doubts because of the wounds of Christ. When God brought Jesus back from the dead, he left five gaping wounds in his body. That seems cruel to me. If God was going to bring him back, why not heal the wounds? If he were *my* son, *I* would have.

St. Thomas, too, had his doubts about the resurrection, Jesus came to him. He said, “Come here, Thomas; take my hand. I want you to put your hand into my wounds and feel that I’m alive.”

That’s what the wounds are for. Places for us to enter into somebody else’s life. They are honorable

things—even though most of us spend most of our time trying to hide ‘em. It’s like those other people you always see in paintings of the resurrection. Like the soldiers. They’re strong, oh yes, they’re strong. They’re whole; they’re protected by their armor.

But look at them. They’re asleep! They sleep through the resurrection! I don’t want to sleep through the resurrection, and I don’t want any friend of mine to sleep through it either.

—*This meditation is adapted from a sermon delivered by the character “Father Leo,” on the ABC television series Nothing Sacred. The art is adapted from Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut, Man of Sorrows.*

Quotes, poems, & pithy sayings



FEAST OF FOOLS. (medieval.) A celebration marked by much license and buffoonery, in many parts of Europe, and particularly in France, every year on or about the feast of the Circumcision (January 1). It was known by many names—*festum fatuorum*, *festum stultorum*, *festum hypodiconorum*, among others. John Belet, a liturgical writer of the twelfth century and an Englishman by birth, wrote “now the license which is then permitted is called Decembrian, because

it was customary of old among the pagans that during this month slaves and serving-maids should have a sort of liberty given them, and should be put upon an equality with their masters, in celebrating a common festivity.” The central idea seems always to have been that of the old Saturnalia, i.e. a brief social revolution, in which power, dignity or impunity is conferred for a few hours upon those ordinarily in a subordinate position. Whether it took the form of the boy bishop or the subdeacon conducting the cathedral office, the parody must always have trembled on the brink of burlesque. We can trace the same idea at St. Gall in the tenth century, where a student, on the thirteenth of December each year, enacted the part of the abbot. By the time of the Council of Trent, the practice was virtually outlawed by churchmen for whom decorum and the maintenance of the *status quo* were important. In the early 1970s the practice was celebrated in a book by Harvard’s Harvey Cox, *Feast of Fools*, about a new notion called “the Theology of Play.”

“It ain’t supposed to make sense; it’s faith. Faith is when you believe something nobody in his right mind would believe.”

—“Archie Bunker,” *All in the Family*

If we would follow Jesus, we must take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence. The call to follow at once

produces a new situation. To stay in the old situation makes discipleship impossible. Levi must leave the receipt of custom and Peter his nets in order to follow Jesus. One would have thought that nothing so drastic was necessary at such an early stage. Could not Jesus have initiated the publicans into some new religious experience, and leave them as they were before? He could have done so, had he not been the incarnate Son of God. But since he is the Christ, he must make it clear from the start that his word is not an abstract doctrine, but the recreation of the whole life of man. The only right and proper way is quite literally to go with Jesus.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Worship is dangerous. It is not a retreat from reality, but a direct engagement with ultimate reality: God. Genuine worship is a response to God and what God has done; in it we make ourselves vulnerable to the story of Israel and Jesus. Sham worship attempts to manipulate and transform God, but true worship praises God *as God is* and calls Christians to risk the transformation of themselves and the world.

—Robert Webber and Rodney Clapp, *People of the Truth*

“We are fools for Christ’s sake,” Paul says, faith says—the faith that ultimately the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men, the lunacy of Jesus saner than the grim sanity of the world. Through the eyes of faith, too, the Last Supper, though on one level a tragic farewell and failure...is also, at its deeper level, the foreshadowing of great hope and the bodying forth of deep mystery. Frail, fallible, foolish as he knows he disciples to be, Jesus feeds them with himself. The bread is his flesh, the wine is his blood, and they are all of them including Judas to drink him down. They are to take his life into themselves and come alive with it, to be his hands and feet in a world where he no longer has hands and feet, to feed his lambs.

—Frederick Buechner,
The Faces of Jesus



art by Sally Lynn Askins

April fool (and january, february, march, may...)

a children's sermon

by Mark McClintock

Author's note: Enter wearing funny slippers—the kind that look like bear paws, or ducks, or a cartoon character, for example. Or, if you're really brave, come decked out in pajamas and a bathrobe. On your head, wear a dunce cap. This can easily be made by rolling a large sheet of paper into a cone and taping it. If you have younger children, a model ark and a small trumpet will make nice visual aids, as will a small cross. Adapt the following conversation to your personality. Please feel free to elaborate, trim, alter, and otherwise be creative!

What are you all staring at? What's so funny? Oh, my goodness, I'm still in my slippers! I guess most of you don't wear slippers to church, do you? Boy, do I feel foolish. In fact, I believe I'm wearing something called a Fool's Cap...or sometimes it's called a Dunce Cap. Back when some of your grandparents were in school, if they said something or did something foolish, the teacher might have made them wear one of these for the whole school to see. How do you think that might have felt? (*Listen attentively to the children's answers.*)

Well, I'll tell you the truth. I wore these slippers and this cap on purpose. I wore them to teach you about being foolish. Has any of you ever done something foolish that you'd like to tell about? (*Allow one or two children to share their stories. Offer to let them wear the dunce cap while they speak.*) Have you ever done something foolish on purpose? (*Allow another story or two to be told.*) Why did you do it?

You know, the Bible is full of people who did foolish things. Think about Noah. What did he do that was foolish? Built an enormous, bigger-than-a-football-field-size boat in the mountains! What a foolish thing to do! What about Joshua and the Hebrew people outside the walls of Jericho? Did they attack the city? No, they marched around it for seven days blowing trumpets, for goodness sake! And then there's King David, who took off his clothes and danced at the front of a parade, and Isaiah, who walked around naked for three years. Does that sound pretty foolish? Maybe I should have given him my slippers and cap.

But wait a minute. Wasn't it God who told Noah to build the ark? And didn't the ark save Noah and his family from drowning? Wasn't it God who told Joshua to blow trumpets, and didn't the walls fall down so that the Hebrews could capture the city? And whom do you think David was honoring with his dance? Who do you think told Isaiah to walk around

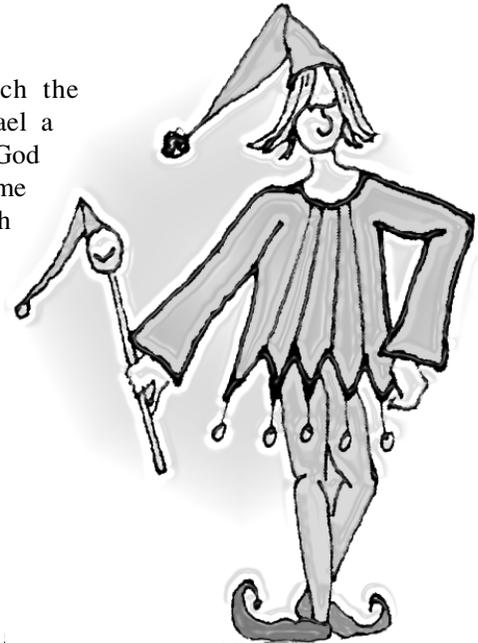
naked to teach the people of Israel a lesson? God! God asks us to do some pretty foolish things, right?

After all, God did perhaps the most foolish thing of all. God came down from holy heaven to sinful earth, became a human being, was born in a place where the only bed was an animal's feedbox, grew up in a world where he was made fun of and called names, then let himself be beaten and spit on, and hung on a cross to die. God, who created the whole universe and was strong enough to rescue the Hebrews from Egypt, died on a cross! Is that foolish, or what?

And yet...wasn't it because God did such a foolish thing that we can become God's own children? And wasn't it because Jesus died without sinning that he rose to a new life that he wants to share with all of us? Thank goodness for God's foolishness! That's very close to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God". Sometimes being foolish is the wise thing to do, especially when our foolishness is obedience to God. Being a fool can feel embarrassing, even Paul knew that. But it can also show the world how much God loves us. Maybe next week, we should all wear fool's caps. Let's pray.

God, thank you for your foolishness. Give us the courage to be fools, too—to laugh at ourselves a little more, to do crazy things like love people who hate us, share our food and toys and money with people who have nothing, and to tell people how much you love us, even when it's embarrassing. In the name of our foolish Savior and Lord, Jesus, Amen.

—Mark McClintock is a minister in Waco, Texas.



art adapted from Kings, Queens, Knights, and Jesters

Communion of holy fools: a Maundy Thursday service

by Katie Cook
(with a lot of help)

For this service we suggest the same setting/props that you used for the Ash Wednesday service, with the addition of a door lying on the floor in the middle of the circle—or in front, if your group is large, perhaps placed on a table so that the group can see it. It might be fun to use a child's tea set for the communion dishes. (One person went so far as to use Kool-aid—in Dixie cups—and animal crackers for the elements. This may or may not appeal to you.) You will also need a bowl or bowls of warm water and towels for footwashing. Display this with the communion paraphernalia, but don't mention it.

On Palm Sunday, host a showing of Godspell. Tell the congregation that they will need to attend this in order to really understand the communion service on Thursday. You may want to prepare the younger ones—or maybe the older ones, who sometimes have trouble getting beyond the 1970s music. (Some of them will love it.) Tell them it's not about musical style, it's about seeing the life and teachings of Jesus in a new way.

At the end of the movie, ask the people to think about this: if Jesus were to paint a symbol on your face, what would it be? Ask each one to sketch what he or she thinks his or her symbol might be and give it to you by Wednesday. (If you think they'll forget, pass out paper and colored pencils, and collect the sketches from them Sunday night. Make sure they're labeled with each person's name.) Don't tell them what it's for.

Find an artist in your group. When John Ballenger and I did this for a retreat, we recruited Seeds artist and writer Sharon Rollins. Sharon watched the movie, which she hadn't seen before, and then collected the elements for a "Jesus" costume: a Superman shirt, rainbow suspenders, a red silk carnation, and baggy pants. She gathered a set of paints and brushes. (Sally Lynn Askins says that you can make very good face paint with Jergen's lotion, a little bit of dishwashing soap, and tempera color.)

At a certain point in the worship service (this was at a contemplative retreat called "Fools in the Eyes of the World") Sharon took off her jacket, revealing the Superman-Jesus costume, and proceeded to paint on her own face (one of us held a hand mirror while she knelt on the floor) the markings that Victor Garber's Jesus had on his face in the movie. Then she went around the circle with all of the sketches in one hand and painted each person's chosen symbol on his or her face. She showed each one in the mirror what she had done. This was done in silence as music played. It will need to be done at the beginning of your communion service—we suggest during the prelude. (We have it listed under "Personal Symbols." If you print the order of worship you don't want to spoil the surprise...)

Later, just before the distribution of the elements, Sharon took a cloth and some skin cream and removed the symbols, while "Where Are You Going?" from the movie soundtrack was playing.

Arrange discreetly beforehand for the footwashing part of the service. You could do the washing yourself or ask someone else to do it. If this is a new thing to your group, find two adventurous people to wash each other's feet as a symbol of the servanthood of all. If your group is not new to it, you or someone else could start the process and then allow the people to act on their own feelings.

You will need to assign the scripture readings beforehand. The service itself is more meaningful if conducted mostly in silence.

During the event called "Scripture and Interpretation," your reader will simply begin reading the scripture. As they begin to read, your "footwasher" will gather the bowl and towels and begin quietly to wash the feet of the first recipient. Then they can switch positions. If you want to allow time for others to act, wait until both scriptures are completed. Then, if people are still "washing," discreetly begin playing quiet music. When they are finished, then you can proceed with the service.

When the time comes for distribution of the elements, we suggest doing it in complete silence while the music plays. You can give the participants instructions before the service begins, if that seems to be called for.

You will probably want to keep the lights somewhat dim and conduct the passing of the peace in a subdued manner.

As always, we are counting on you to use your own judgment and adapt all of these things to your own needs.

—lkc



Maundy Thursday Order of Worship

Meditation

"We are fools for Christ's sake," Paul says, faith says—the faith that ultimately the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men, the lunacy of Jesus saner than the grim sanity of the world. Through the eyes of faith, too, the Last Supper, though on one level a tragic farewell and failure...is also, at its deeper level, the foreshadowing of great hope and the bodying forth of deep mystery. Frail, fallible, foolish as he knows he disciples to be, Jesus feeds them with himself. The bread is his flesh, the wine is his blood, and they are all of them including Judas to drink him down. They are to take his life into themselves and come alive with it, to be his hands and feet in a world where he no longer has hands and feet, to feed his lambs.

—Frederick Buechner, *The Faces of Jesus*

Entering into Worship

Interpretation: Personal Symbols

"Prelude" from John Michael Talbot's The Lord's Supper

Scripture

Isaiah 53

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Litany

LEADER:

*Emmanuel
You come in silence
to my world of crooked noisy places,
places rough with agendas
that leave me bruised,
spirit light low,
a bare glowing ember.*

PEOPLE:

*Emmanuel
I will give you quiet moments,
bits of silence stolen
from the clamor of the streets.*

ALL:

*Let my silence straighten
a way for you
to smooth my rough spots,
to heal my bruised spirit,
to fan my faith's faint flame,
to prepare in me a vessel
for your incarnation.*

—Lisa Wells Isenhower

Scripture and Interpretation

John 13:1-20

Isaiah 65: 17:25

Interpretation: Personal Symbols

"By My Side" from Godspell

Communion

"On the Willows" from Godspell

Passing of the Peace

Anointed with the spirit of Easter

a service to be led by youth

by Katie Cook

Note: This service can take place among youth or college students, or it can be led by them for the entire congregation. Several hymns and songs are suggested, but please adapt these to your own needs and styles. Your young people might choose to add pantomime of the events to coincide with the readings. Your readers (or actors) could wear period biblical costumes, choir robes, or street clothing. (The words of Jesus are read by the Fifth Reader, the words of Mary Magdalene are read by the Fourth Reader, and the words of Thomas are read by the Third Reader. If your readers wear period costumes, you might keep this in mind when choosing theirs.) You might want to dramatize the readings by leaving the room in semi-darkness until the point where the Fifth Reader says, "Go tell them I am alive," and then raise the lights. Easter lilies, irises, balloons, and white banners would also add to the festive look. These should be hidden until the moment you raise the lights.

Prelude

"Non Nobis Domine" from the Henry V Soundtrack (Patrick Doyle)

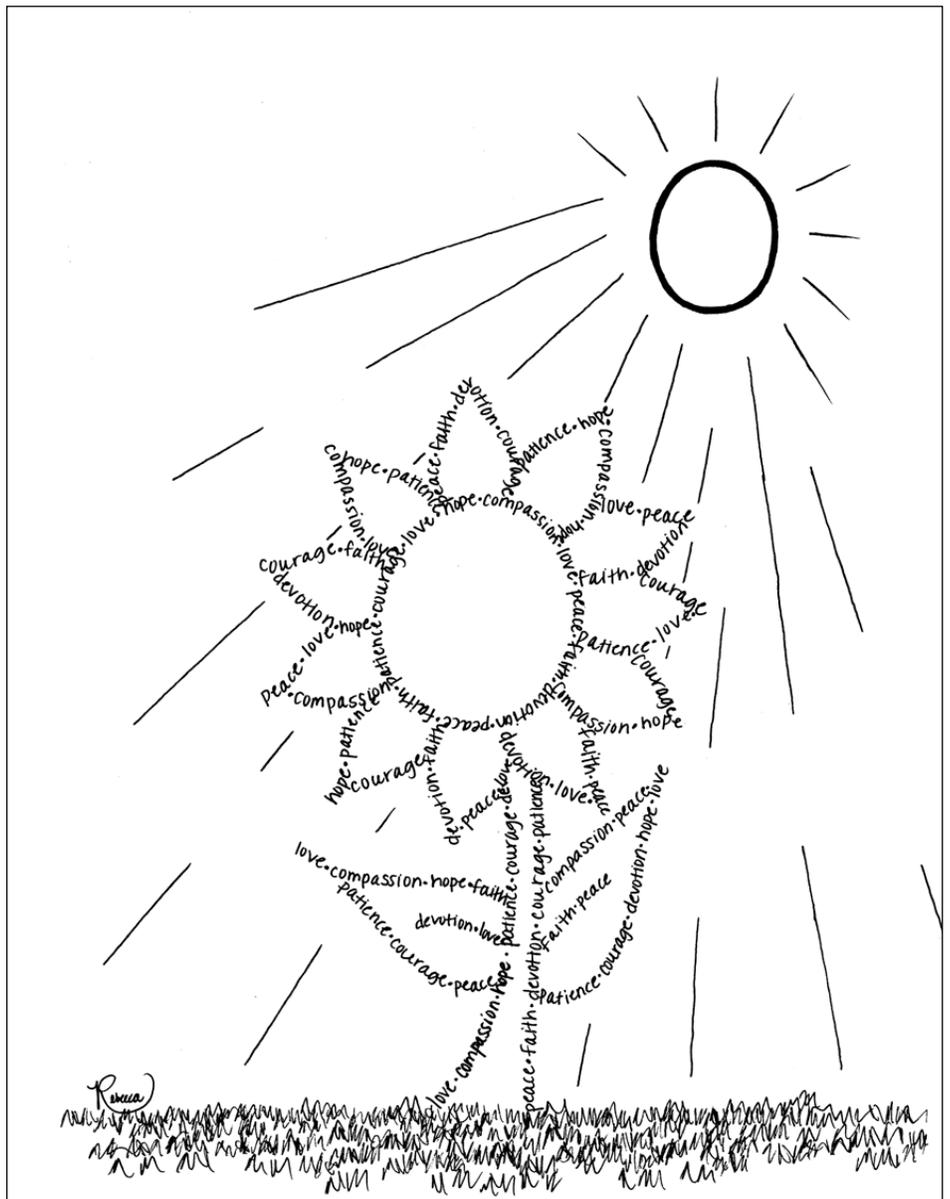
Dramatic reading from the scripture

Adapted from the John 20:1-18,
The Message

FIRST READER: Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone was moved away from the entrance. She ran at once to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, breathlessly panting,

FOURTH READER: They took the Master from the tomb. We don't know where they've put him.

SECOND READER: Peter and the other disciple left immediately for the tomb. They ran, neck and neck. The other disciple got to the tomb first, outrunning Peter. Stooping to look in, he



art by Rebecca Ward

saw the pieces of linen cloth lying there, but he didn't go in.

THIRD READER: Simon Peter arrived after him, entered the tomb, observed the linen cloths lying there, and the kerchief used to cover his head—not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself.

FIRST READER: Then the other disciple, the one who had gotten there first, went into the tomb, took one look at the evidence, and believed. No one yet knew from the Scripture that he would rise from the dead.

SECOND READER: These two disciples then went back home.

THIRD READER: But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, he knelt to look into the tomb,

SECOND READER: And she saw two angels sitting there, dressed in white—one at the head, the other at the foot of where Jesus' body had been laid! They said to her,

FIFTH READER: Woman, why do you weep?

FOURTH READER: They took my Master, and I don't know where they put him.

FIRST READER: After she said this, she turned away and saw Jesus standing there. But she didn't recognize him. Thinking he was the gardener, she said,

FOURTH READER: Mister, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can care for him.

SECOND READER: Jesus said,

FIFTH READER: Mary.

THIRD READER: Then she recognized him. She said,

FOURTH READER: Teacher!

SECOND READER: He said to her,

FIFTH READER: Go to the others and tell them I'm alive.

Congregational singing

“He is Alive” from *Celebrate Life*
or “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”
(#233 in *The Worshiping Church*)

Family/reflections

“What the Wounds are For”
(see page 14 of this packet)

Dramatic reading from the scripture

Adapted from the John 20:1-18, The Message

FIRST READER: On that same day that Mary had spoken with the Master in the garden, she told them all that she had seen and heard.

SECOND READER: The disciples had gathered together, but fearful of the Jews, they had locked all the doors in the house.

FOURTH READER: Jesus entered, stood among them, and said,

FIFTH READER: Peace to you.

FOURTH READER: Then he showed them his hands and side.

FIRST READER: The disciples, seeing him with their own eyes, were exuberant. Jesus repeated his greeting:

FIFTH READER: Peace to you. Just as God has sent me, I send you.

SECOND READER: Then he took a deep breath and breathed on them. He said,

FIFTH READER: I want you to receive the Holy Spirit now.

FOURTH READER: But Thomas, sometimes called the Twin, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

SECOND READER: The other disciples told him, We saw the Master. But he said,

THIRD READER: Unless I see the nail holes in his hands, put my finger in the nail holes, and stick my hand in his side, I won't believe it.

FIRST READER: Eight days later, the disciples were again in the same room.

FOURTH READER: This time Thomas was with them. Jesus came through the locked doors, stood among them, and said,

FIFTH READER: Peace to you.

FOURTH READER: Then he focused his attention on Thomas.

FIFTH READER: Take your finger and examine my hands. Take your hand and stick it in my side. Don't be unbelieving. Believe.

SECOND READER: Thomas said,

THIRD READER: My Master! My God!

FOURTH READER: Jesus said,

FIFTH READER: So, you believe because you've seen with your own eyes. Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing.

FIRST READER: Jesus provided far more God-revealing signs than are written down in this book. These are written down so you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and in the act of believing, have real and eternal life in the way he personally revealed it.

Congregational singing

“Easter Song”
(#244 in *The Worshiping Church*)
or “The Day of Resurrection”
(#247 in *The Worshiping Church*)

Benediction

FIRST READER: The spirit of Easter has fallen upon us, to preach good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captives.

SECOND READER: Our hands have touched the holes in his hands.

(continued)

THIRD READER: Our eyes have seen the wounds in his side.

FOURTH READER: We have known suffering, and received peace from him.

FIRST READER: We are apostles of the one called Christ.

SECOND READER: There is much darkness and chaos around us. Our world seems to be falling apart; the center will not hold.

FIFTH READER: Your eyes are anointed with the spirit of Easter. Go and fill the world with the light that cannot be overcome.

THIRD READER: There is pain and sorrow, confusion and despair in the hearts of our friends, our loved ones, ourselves.

FIFTH READER: Your hearts are anointed with the spirit of Easter. Go and fill the world with healing and hope.

FOURTH READER: There are wars around the globe, destruction in our land, and violence on our streets and in our homes.

FIFTH READER: Your minds are anointed with the spirit of Easter. Go and fill the world with the waging of peace.

FIRST READER: We will step out of this place into a world that sees us as fools.

FIFTH READER: Your lives are anointed with the spirit of Easter. Go and turn the world upside down.

ALL READERS: The spirit of Easter has fallen upon us, to preach good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captives.

FIRST READER: May God give us courage. May God guide our steps. May God intoxicate us with the spirit of Easter.

Postlude

“Kum Ba Ya/Kyrie” from *Prayer and Plainsong*
by Cynthia Clawson (the final track)



art by Sally Lynn Askins

The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction, but for those one the way of salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out. It's written,

“I'll turn conventional wisdom on its head,

I'll expose so-called experts as crackpots.”

So where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn't God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense? Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in God's wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb—preaching, of all things!—to bring those who trust God into the way of salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:18-21, The Message