

Sermon: "Fools for Christ" 1 Cor. 1:18-27 and 4:10*"We are fools for Christ sake, but you are wise in Christ."*

Now the apostle Paul is not generally thought of as a comical kind of guy. Nor is Jesus either for that matter, but I would submit to you that both have been treated with over-somberness throughout history. Jesus for example often used humor at he taught. Take hyperbole for example, or exaggeration, a form of humorous speech in which we exaggerate like "I am hungry as a horse" or "strong as an ox." That's humor, an inside joke. In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus told great extravagance when he asked: "And why do you look at *the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye?* Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! (which means actor by the way) "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye" (Luke 6:41-42). Okay, so maybe that's not a knee-slapper, but effective you must admit. That is just one example; there are hundreds when you read the gospels closely.

Now Paul is making an argument, with humor, to the new and struggling church family at Corinth, Greece. This whole idea that a divine being, Yahweh God, would have his son executed and then come back from the dead was "foolishness" to the Greek culture, just as it was an embarrassment to the Jews, from whom Jesus came. But Paul says "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom." Turn the table on these wise guys. Be a fool for Christ. God is laughing right now. Easter is the world's greatest practical joke – the tomb was empty. He is not there. He is risen from the dead. That's why our cover artist pictures him by the sea, laughing. God pulled one over on death.

Laughter is good for our souls. It is the music of the soul, says one proverb. We need to take time to laugh. And laughter is good for our bodies too. Many books have been written from Norman Cousins on in recent years showing the healing use of laughter in medical recovery. One writer said, "your ulcers can't grow while you're laughing."

A minister goes to visit a critically ill member of his congregation in the hospital. He walks over to the bedside, sadly, and asks the man, "Is there anything I can do for you Mr. Johnson?"

"Yes, Pastor," wheezed Johnson, "you can get your foot off my oxygen tube."

A man went to his doctor in bad shape. The doctor checked him over thoroughly without finding anything obviously wrong, so he decided to ask some questions. "Do you drink coffee?" he asked. "Yes, I do, said the man. "How much do you drink?" asked the doctor. "Oh, I'd say about 20 cups a day?" "Twenty cups! Doesn't that keep you awake?" "Well," he replied, "it does help a little."

A rural man from Kentucky went to the hospital to take some tests. A nurse asked him to bring a specimen to her in a cup. The man was shy, however, and he talked his wife into returning the cup to the nurse. "Is this urine?" the nurse asked. "No ma'am, it's his'n."

Ministry is an area where humor is vitally necessary, because we deal so constantly with serious issues whether of salvation and life's crises. The running of the church itself can be an occasion for humor, ask any elder or deacon.

A church was having its monthly Session meeting. The treasury was in better shape than usual so the moderator asked if there were any special needs. One woman said she felt the church needed a *chandelier*. A penny-pinching elder jumped up and said, "I'm against it and for three reasons. Number One, nobody would know

how to spell it, number Two, nobody here would know how to play it, and number three, what this church needs is more light."

But of course, ministry is more than church lighting. Much of your time as a pastor is spent in calling on folks in special need. I remember being a new pastor when I was asked to call on a longtime member in a nursing home, referred to by most as Aunt Sally. Aunt Sally was quite old and I was nervous as I called on her. She had a bowl of peanuts by her bedside and I kept eating a few, until when I finally got up to leave, I realized I had eaten all of her peanuts. I said, "I am so sorry, I have eaten up all of your peanuts." "Oh, that's all right," Aunt Sally said, "I'd already gummed all the chocolate off of them anyhow."

Now maybe that doesn't compete with the story a few years back about the man in Kentucky who was walking down the road when he met an old friend, all dressed up from head to foot with a hat, a three-piece suit, fancy tie, and shined shoes, carrying a Bible under his arm. He was surprised to see his friend so dressed, so he stopped to ask where he was going.

"Well, I'm going to Lawrenceburg, Indiana. I've been hearing about the sporting houses up there, with all them good-looking women, and I aim to go up there and have me a good time."

"But if you're going up to the sporting houses, why are you carrying your Bible?" asked the friend. "If them sporting houses are as interesting as I hear tell," he replied, "I might just stay over till Sunday."

Now up here in these parts, you find a lot of Catholic churches, but in parts of Appalachia it's still quite rare to ever see a priest. The story is told about a Catholic priest who came out of a store one day and a drunk man bumped into him and said, "My God, mister, you got your collar on backwards!" The priest replied, "No, you don't understand. I'm Father Jones." The drunk said, "Well, I got four kids myself, but I don't wear my collar turned around like that." The catholic said, "You still don't understand. I'm the father of thousands." The man said, "Well, buddy, you ought to turn your pants around backwards."

Really what we have in Kentucky is a whole lot of Baptists, of every stripe. They say there that everyone is a Baptist, underneath it all. A Methodist is a Baptist who's afraid of water; a Presbyterian is a Baptist who went to college; an Episcopalian is a Baptist whose deals all worked out; a Unitarian is a Baptist who can't count; and a Catholic is a Baptist convert upon whom the full import of Calvinism has just dawned.

I'm not sure it's true, but the story goes that Ohio passed a law prohibiting any more Kentuckians from moving to Ohio. However, one legislator pointed out that Ohio had received a whole lot of doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers and so forth from Kentucky. So, they amended the law to allow skilled persons to enter for residence. The police were to stop and question people at the Ohio side of the bridges. A fellow drove up and stopped. The policeman asked, "What do you do?" "I'm a pilot," he said, and they let him go in.

The fellow just behind him drove up and they asked him what he did. "I'm a wood-chopper," he said. "You can't come in," said the policeman, "we already have more wood-choppers than we need." "But you let my cousin in that red pick-up in," said the man. "Yes, but he is a pilot." "Well, he can't pile it if I don't chop it," he replied.

Maybe you heard of the preacher who began with the modest disclaimer, "You know I am just a poor country preacher." "I know," said the elderly lady. "I've heard you preach."

Preaching is a source of great concern to both preacher and flock. Like the pastor who waited at the door after Sunday worship, and inquired of the lady parishioner, "Was my sermon too long today?" "No," she said, "it just seemed long." "I'm sorry to hear that," said the pastor. "Oh, don't be," she said, "it was one of the best long

speeches I have ever heard. I just thought it was superfluous." "Good. I intend to have it published posthumously." "I hope you hurry," she said, "I want to read it."

Well, "I got a million of 'em" said the late Jimmy Durante. But one more. They tell about the devout woman who saved up for a trip to London so she could see St. Paul's Cathedral, which she had heard about. She arrived in London and went to services at St. Paul's on Sunday. She had never seen nor heard anything so beautiful. The grand organ pealed, the choirs sang, and the whole thing was so wonderful to her. She got so excited she jumped up and shouted, "Glory hallelujah!" An usher in a cutaway coat quickly came down the aisle and said, "Madam, we don't allow outbursts here!" "I can't help it," she said, "I've got religion." The usher drew himself up and said stiffly, "Well, you didn't get it here!"

Personally, I do hope you get it here, and find some time to laugh at yourself and your life with God. The tomb is empty! Be a fool for Christ. Here's laughing with you Jesus. Alleluia! Amen.