

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 7th March 2021
Lent 3 Yr B

Fools for Christ

The role of the fool in Shakespeare has been that of the one who speaks truth in the face of nonsense. The fool in King Lear reflects back to Lear his own stupidity and pomposity until eventually Lear, in utter destitution, comes to his sense in the midst of a storm that probably reflects the mental state of the King.

The fool is the one person at court who could say things as they truly were. Where courtiers feared for their position or their advancement the fool or jester had no standing or place to lose. The fool could overstep the mark, but a good fool would know where their boundaries were, how far they could go and what was too far.

The fool was also counter cultural. In the context of the court where fine dress and good manners were expected, along with high birth and personal wealth, the fool had none of these. The fool had their ridiculous outfit, often itself lampooning the King in royal dress, they were almost certainly themselves from a lowly background with no birth right other than perhaps that of foolery.

So the fool speaks truth to power; honesty to flummery and is a counter cultural statements in an institutional setting.

We may ask what Paul means by being a fool for Christ in this mornings first reading. In our modern understanding a food is more akin to an idiot or a dolt. To be considered a fool is nothing great, in fact it is an insult.

The fool of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is reflective of the former than the latter interpretation of fool. Though we would see and may still experience the belief that those of faith are fools in the second definition. More of that later. In this letter Paul speaks out into the experience of the Corinthian Church as their faith is questioned in the Hellenistic world of logic, philosophy and science. Hellenistic thinking would see the teachings of Jesus, the belief in a man who it was claimed was the Saviour of the World yet let himself be arrested and

crucified would have to be foolish nonsense. Where is the wisdom in that? Where is the glory? In the resurrection? Well they definitely had problems with the idea of raising the dead. How could anyone take seriously such teaching based upon such nonsense, such foolish teaching, and then to believe in the coming of God's Kingdom and the resurrection of the faithful! Absolute rubbish.

Here is the rub. The good news of Jesus is forgiveness of sins, the salvation of our souls and life everlasting. The thing is too that the way of faith, the teachings of Jesus were and still are contrary to what would be expected. Put God first, care for others as you would care for yourself, the first come last and the last first. The very teachings of Jesus are counter cultural, counter intuitive.

To be a fool for Christ is not to be a fool in the eyes of God. it is to recognise the way of God is not necessarily the way of the humanity and to be a fool for Christ is to be a fool in the sight of the world, for Christ. To follow the way of faith is to have a God centred understanding of all things, not a self centred view. To be a fool for Christ leads us into ridicule from the world.

We perhaps miss this point today as we are used to living in a society whose foundations at least are buried in an historical Christian tradition. Yet with the passage of time and the growing distance between modern society and the Christian faith it is all the more important that we should be prepared to stand out and speak truth to power as a counter cultural force proclaiming a way of life that is not centred on the self but on others through whom and to whom we can express the love of God revealed in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.