

"Friends and Fools"

John 15:9-17

May 21, 2006

The young couple invited their pastor for Sunday dinner. While they were in the kitchen preparing the meal, the pastor visited with their young son. As they talked the conversation turned to what they were having for dinner. The little boy said that he was not sure because they had never had it before. But he did say that he had heard his parents say they were having 'clown' for dinner. "Clown?" replied the surprised pastor, "Are you sure? - I think you must have heard wrong." "Maybe," said the youngster. "All I know is that I heard Dad say to Mom, 'Today is just as good as any to have that clown for dinner.'"

Well, here we are. Dressing the part of a fool. We have our clowns, yes. And I am thankful for the willingness of some of our church council members to join the fun today. I am thankful that these leaders in our church care enough about our youth that they would set aside their dignified ways and be a bit foolish in order to support the youth trip to the National Youth Gathering in San Antonio, Texas that we will be attending in mid July. We believe that such an experience can have a profound effect on each of their lives as they share a week of Christian music and message with 25000 other kids from around the United States. We will continue to ask for you to support us in your prayers and encouragement. We have a great group of kids and an even greater God that we pray will be connected throughout their lives.

Today's Gospel is a very good word for a day when we are acting out the role of being "fools for Christ". Jesus is gathered with His closest followers at a time just before He will be arrested and crucified. They are very intimate moments as Jesus faces leaving them and sending them out on their own. I suspect that Jesus may have wondered what He should say to them - any last words of advice and encouragement. And what He tells them is that He loves them. What He tells them is that they are His friends. I try to imagine what kind of powerful impact that must have had on the disciples. I imagine that those disciples must have come to be in awe of this one with whom they have been spending so much time as they have come to understand that He was the Christ - the son of the living God. Maybe they could not fully understand it but certainly they knew that He was someone that was incredibly special. And now Jesus is calling them friends - now Jesus is reminding them that He loves them. Imagine the impact on a group of simple fishermen as they come to see that Jesus is serious. He chose them - - - He loves them [simple as they are] - - - He is their friend [no matter their faults and shortcomings].

And then He was taken from them. Then He was crucified. Then He was gone and they were left to live in a world that wanted to throw them in the arena with the

lions. To the world they were fools - fools who would profess faith in an outlaw of the church and the state - fools who would hold on to what they believed to be true about God. - Why would they do it? Why would they stand up for their faith against the powerful forces of the world? Perhaps they were willing to be fools because they were friends of the one who died and rose again.

Today, I am going to ask all of you to dare to be fools. Dare to be fool because of the one who has chosen you and called you 'friend'.

It takes a lot of guts to be a fool. You have to either be a bit crazy or really passionate about what it is that you believe. When I was thinking about dressing up like this for worship this morning, I did a bit of 'web surfing' to try to see if I could find anything helpful. When I was reading some history on 'the fool' or the 'court jester' I was fascinated with some of the history. The Jester - the fool - was a very important figure in the royal courts of days gone by. This person was far more than entertainment. Though the court jester may have dressed funny and done some silly things - it was this 'fool' who was allowed to get away with saying anything that came to mind. Where everyone else who surrounded the king had to be very careful in what they said for fear of falling out of favor with the king, the jester could get away with telling the truth - no matter how harsh or contrary to the thoughts of the king. This person might be thought of as the clown, or even a buffoon / a fool by many - but he was the one who dared to tell the truth. One article said, "There are many stories which show a jester as the only person who could counsel a stubborn king, and as such the myth of the court jester suggests that jesters could act as a check on the whimsical power of absolute monarchy." Another said: "the Fool's persona may be found in the Christian ideal of a character neither corrupted by the world nor impressed by worldly status or authority. They are the eternal virginity of spirit, which in the dark winter of the world, continually proclaims the existence of new life, giving faithful promise of the spring of an invisible kingdom, and the coming of light.'

Are we not called to be 'fools for Christ'? Jesus told us that we were to be 'salt' for a world that has lost its zest and 'light' for a world that too often prefers the darkness. And the world around us may well look at us and question the sanity of our faith. The world around us will call us 'fools' for not conforming to the ways of the world.

The story is told of a man named Genesius who lived in 3rd century Rome. Genesius was an actor who often mocked the Christian faith. The Roman Emperor named Diocletian [who was one of the harshest persecutors of Christians] was in attendance at a performance where he was supposed to be portraying a believer who was about to be baptized. In the middle of the performance, Genesius suddenly stopped the performance and declared his faith in Jesus Christ. He was quickly taken before the Emperor who turned him over to the praetorium guard who tortured him in an effort to get him to denounce Christ and make a sacrifice to a pagan god. Genesius, though

**he had just become a believer, would not and the Emperor had him beheaded.
Within the Catholic church he is called the Patron Saint of Actors.**

Are you willing to stand up for the truth of the Gospel and for your faith in Jesus even when the pressure of the world gets intense and those around you may call you a fool? Remember, Jesus chose you and calls you friend. Jesus died for you and rose again. May you always be His friend. May you always dare to be a fool for Christ!

AMEN