



Send in the Clowns

Prophets and Clowns – imagination and resistance in action
Chris Walton and Ross Ashley introduce the clown

Why the image of a clown?

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of humans. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2.5-8

This is the role of the clown: not the circus clown, more the court jester. Not the slapstick artist, more the fool on the edge of things, willing to be clown enough to seek the kingdom of God without any expectation of any reward or blessing.

Jesus was made into a clown. The prophet is a clown. You make yourself nobody, empty yourself, to be filled by the earth's agenda. We are a community of prophets and clowns, anonymous but not defeated; in the minority but not hopeless; easily ridiculed but not destroyed; resilient but not dogmatic; open-minded as a community but not giving up easily. Prophets and clowns are willing to be vulnerable, laying themselves open by acting as servants in a world which despises weakness, lack of ambition and difference.

In the Summer of 2008 Paul Bodenham, Chair of CEL (see GC65) invited us to engage the heart in our eco-praxis. His 'Liberation Cycle' has sustained us over the years – See, grieve, hope, act. We take another look at this cycle of intentional vulnerability for clowns and prophets.

See

Where are the clowns?*

Many years ago in my early years in pastoral ministry I developed the process of working from experience to the Bible, rather than the other way round.

Understanding the contemporary context and offering that up to the story of the Bible produced a powerful hermeneutic, which opened up space for members of my Churches to imagine-against-the-stream. My preaching did not provide a restful, inner sense of peace, a way of moving closer to God's 'still waters' (Psalm 23:2), despite what is going on in the world but rather, an honest assessment of a situation and the poetry to inspire 'a shared willingness to engage in gestures of resistance and acts of deep hope'.

Grieve

Where are the clowns?*

Prophetic consciousness knows that there is no newness without grief. The appalling plight of the suffering earth, the statistics of death and destruction of all species can only bring us on our knees with grief. Acknowledgement of our own weaknesses and failures comprehensively results in tears. If we never shed a tear, it's like saying there's nothing wrong; we are in denial. 'Weeping is a theologically-grounded act of resistance'.

Act

There ought to be clowns*

Jesus demanded not only that we love our friends but our enemies too; not only that we preach and pray, but that we feed the hungry, visit those in prison, clothe the naked, care for the whole earth community. It is in our actions offering the poor hospitality, resisting the tide of injustice and poverty which the powers that rule the earth use to destroy the earth itself that we learn what it really means to be clowns (fools) for Christ's sake. Only then will the bruised and bleeding community of Christ pour out fresh healing and hope in an age of devastating despair.

Hope

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CEL member, Ross Ashley articulates the Storm of Hope as wild foolishness. As it sees and grieves hope acts as though stories can be changed, and it is we who must change them. It is the living out of what one envisages as though the story has changed, believing it can change. Hope will believe in a determined, imaginative way, and can work as a powerful, peaceful underground – a resistance. This will mean action – fighting for change, exposing the areas where fear rules quietly, and perhaps most importantly working on the edge, being prepared to be judged a fool, making sacrifices, making noises, insisting on being heard, regardless of whether it is seen to win or be proved right.

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Don't bother, they're here!*

This issue indicates that the CEL community's prophets and clowns are out and about. It does not mean acceptance, the world does not immediately welcome us as we stagger belatedly into the arena. Some will ask where we've been all this time, some castigate us for our 'politics'. Others will cling to their private God, others stare and laugh at our servanthood, others simply ignore us.



Photo: Brian Homer

We'll just continue on the journey of becoming ordinary clowns, like Jesus, in extraordinary times. ■

* see p.20