

Homecoming Season

August 21 – October 8, 2022

How do we reweave connections through playing and cherishing the Holy Fool?

Dear Friends,

We begin a new year with the promise of reweaving connections within and beyond our First Unitarian Community during the coming year. Let's explore how we can play the Holy Fool and accept the Holy Fools among us.

Who are the Holy Fools? In the European tradition, they are court jesters who are permitted to speak truth to power because they are seen as fools. Holy fools may be as naïve as children who have not learned to cloak their pronouncements in flowery language, who have not learned to comply with societal norms. Think of the Hans Christian Andersen tale of 'The Emperor's New Clothes' in which the town's weavers have fooled everyone into believing that the emperor has new clothes and it's only the little child who points out the 'obvious' naked truth, makes everyone laugh and then think.

The Holy Fool is portrayed in the Tarot as intently gazing upward while holding a beautiful flower, oblivious to that fact that they are about to step forward off the cliff. They are often portrayed wearing a knapsack with everything they need. About to take a leap of faith, this is emblematic of starting a spiritual journey into the unknown.

In the Russian Orthodox tradition, the Holy Fool pretends to be mad to provide spiritual guidance without being praised and in that sense it's a form of radical humility. Thirty-six of them have advanced to sainthood!

What does it mean to be a Holy Fool? A crossword clue led me to the Wikipedia definition of the Ig Nobel Prize whose "stated aim [is] to 'honor achievements that first make people laugh, and then make them think.'" That struck me as a concise definition of the Holy Fool. Perhaps the laugh opens us up to deeper thinking. A more formal definition from an Oxford University Press publication:

"The holy fool was an individual who outwardly behaved in an eccentric manner by the commonly accepted standards of his society; inwardly he pursued a religious ideal or was enlivened by mystical experience. . . . the ideal of cultivating a highly personal spiritual life to the disparagement of mundane existence is most forcefully displayed in the early Christian Church." From Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society, by Michael W. Dols.



What about Jesus as Holy Fool? He didn't fit the people's expectations for a Messiah at that time. He went against the societal norms. If he was a prophet, people might expect him to seek wealth and connections. Instead, he lived in poverty and his compatriots were the outcasts. He turned things upside down – the first shall be last and the last shall be first. He spoke truth to power.

Many people think of God as the master clockmaker or as the intentional designer. What if, instead, God favored creative chaos? Did God just kick the whole thing off and then sit back and observe the chaos of creation? If God gave people free will, was that an example of foolish behavior?

Holy Fools are found in many cultures and many religious traditions. Characters such as 'the trickster', Loki, 'shamans' – people who were considered outside the norm or even 'crazy' who also provide spiritual guidance and healing. They show up in literature (Pocket, the jester, in Shakespeare's King Lear) and videogames (<https://persona-arcana.fandom.com/wiki/Fool>).

How will you engage in playing the Holy Fool? Speaking truth to power? Proclaiming the 'naked' truth? Taking risks where you would previously have stayed with what's comfortable? Taking a leap of faith into the unknown? How will you react to the Holy Fools among us? Will you welcome them and be open to transformation? This Homecoming Season, we begin the year by connecting with the fool's journey.

In love and in faith,
Anne J. Perry

Gratitude: *This packet was prepared by Anne J. Perry with the assistance of Rev. AJ Van Tine, Rev. Lane-Mairead Campbell, Rev. Eileen Casey-Campbell and the whole-hearted support of the packet writers team.*

Acknowledgement:

We gather on the ancestral land of the Seneca people, Keepers of the Western Door of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We pay respect to their elders, past and present. We are grateful for their contributions to the Constitution of the United States of America.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Exercise A. What's in Your Backpack for your Spiritual Journey?

Our 3rd Principle:

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.

Think about the Tarot Holy Fool who carries the bare minimum in their backpack. What would you put in your backpack for your spiritual journey? Why? How would your spiritual journey help you reconnect with people and activities at church? Would you risk being laughed at by playing the Holy Fool? Does Listen / Open / Serve help define your journey? What do you need to more fully engage in the mission to:

- Listen deeply to others and ourselves
- Open to wonder and transformation
- Serve together with love and humility

Exercise B. Hysterical Humor

According to the UU Hysterical Society, presenting information in a humorous way results in people hearing it without becoming defensive. Please access the following site:

<https://www.uuhystericalsociety.com/wanna-laugh-on-sundays>

and click “watch” for the Hysterical Women YouTube video. Two UU ministers discuss their experience of trying to fit into a prim and proper UU culture. They are indeed Holy Fools speaking truth to the world. How can we expand our space to welcome those who laugh out loud or who need space to move around to listen well? Go back and re-listen to the story that goes from minute 9:09-13:30 in the video. Now go to the First Unitarian Church website and open the file ‘Homecoming-Holy Fools 2022 Exercise B. Resource’ at the following link:

<https://rochesterunitarian.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Homecoming-HolyFools-2022-Exercise-B.-Resource.pdf>

and locate some rich images / cartoons. What makes you laugh at first and what then makes you think. Choose 2 or 3 images that best illustrate the Holy Fool concept to you, share them with your soul matters group and explain what they mean to you.

Exercise C. Norms in Society and at Your UU Church?

Our 8th Principle:

Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.

Consider the societal norms that perpetuate white supremacy culture. Try making the case for Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr., as Holy Fool. What characteristics fit and what don’t? Who do you identify as contemporary Holy Fools addressing white supremacy and anti-racism? What are the norms or ‘sacred cows’ in your church that contribute to white supremacy culture? Are there Holy Fools challenging those norms? If so, what is your response to them? How can you connect with them and welcome them to your community?

QUESTIONS

1. What keeps you from being a Holy Fool?
2. Did you ever play the Holy Fool? How did that go?
3. Can you imagine Jesus or another religious figure that’s important to you as a Holy Fool? Why or why not?
4. How would your thinking about ‘creation’ change if you could think of ‘God’ as a Holy Fool with a “beginner’s mind,” shaping the world “with curiosity, openness, and playfulness” relishing “the clutter, mess and fecundity that accompany chaos and void”? {Note: see resources ‘God as Holy Fool’}
5. If you are in a relationship with a partner, how did you figure out that you could step off the cliff and give your heart to someone when you know that they could leave you or betray you?
6. Have you known someone you would describe as ‘Crazy as a Fox’? Describe that person and whether you might now consider them to be a Holy Fool?

RESOURCES

Chalice Lighting

To Risk

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.
To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.
To reach out for another is to risk exposing our true self.
To place our ideals—our dreams—before the crowd is to risk loss.
To love is to risk not being loved in return.
To hope is to risk despair.
To try is to risk failure.
To live is to risk dying.
Reading #658 from the Unitarian Universalist Association's Singing the Living Tradition.

Flying Home

The monarchs fly home
To Mexico every autumn.
Over a 3000 mile stretch
Of this wide earth they fly
In staggered generations.
The great great grandchildren
Of lepidopteran pilgrims who

Chalice Extinguishing

The Gift of Imperfection

And so here, in the company of the imperfect,
We seek the better.
Here in the assembly of the incomplete,
We challenge ourselves.
Here in this congregation of folk flawed as we are,
We find communion.
~Rev. Dick Gilbert

Set out from Ontario
Arrive in the Sierra Madres,
A home they know
Only in the shadows
Of ancestral memory.

It is said, great gauzy swarms
Of wayfaring butterflies
In flight over Lake Superior,
Swerve to the east.
Every year they reroute,
Avoiding the path of collision
With an ancient mountain that
Has not existed for eons.

What would it be
To trust so deeply
The wisdom of ancestors
Laid down in my veins and sinew?
What would it be to know
We'll never make it home
And set out toward it
Anyway?
~ Rev. Eileen Casey-Campbell

Leap of Faith

"So, take that leap of faith.
Walk out on the ledge.
Lay aside your doubts,
Stand right on the edge.
Bid your fears goodbye.
And step into the sky.
You gotta take a leap of faith."
~ Leap of Faith, a stage musical. Lyrics by Glenn Slater. Performed by FirstLight Players Rochester, NY, Unitarian in March 2015.

QUOTES:

"One who is strengthened by God professes himself to be an utter fool by human standards, because he despises the wisdom men strive for."

--Thomas Aquinas, Italian Dominican friar and priest, author of Summa Theologica

"The Holy Fool is a truth-teller because he (sic) is an outcast. Those who are not part of the existing social hierarchies are free to blurt out inconvenient truths or question things the rest of us take for granted."

-- Malcolm Gladwell, English-born Canadian journalist, author, and public speaker.

MUSIC

From Singing the Journey

1024 When the Spirit Says Do:

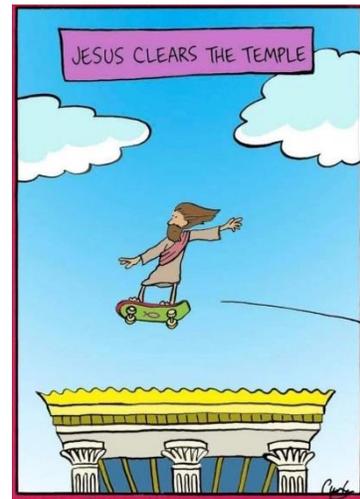
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2T497pkIOk>

BOOKS AND ARTICLES:

Jesus Holy Fool: The Mission of the Unconventional Christ, by Michael Frost

“Missiologist Michael Frost is looking for the real Jesus the man who didn’t care what people thought, worked on the Sabbath, touched the unclean, ate with sinners, and generally contradicted what was acceptable to the leadership of his day. He’s searching for the Jesus who embodies all the characteristics of the ancient tradition of the holy foolish paradigm as described and commended by Paul, the church fathers, and the medieval saints. And he finds him. . . . Sainly fools prefer life out in the open in the secular world, intentionally make themselves conspicuous, and consistently defy rules set by society. Frost directs our minds and hearts to the greater story of Jesus.” From Michael Frost’s website.

<https://mikefrost.net/books/jesus-the-fool/>



Note: “Jesus clears the temple” from UU Hysterical Society.

Fool, by Christopher Moore

A pretty outrageous book, Moore takes us on a very wild, profane but hilarious ride. This one is about the jester named Pocket from King Lear. Moore's books are irreverent and very funny in a dark way. Some may find this a bit too much. It's available in Monroe County Library System and on Libby. You can find used copies of **Fool** for \$5 or \$6 on various sites.

<https://www.chrismoore.com/books/fool/>

Link to More on Ig Nobel Prize

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ig_Nobel_Prize

God As Holy Fool

“What if, rather than calling on a King or Lord or Master, we instead called forth from the infinitude of God the aspect of the Holy Fool? . . . the Fool is a representative of anarchic creativity, rebirth, and possibility. . . . Rather than being an expert architect, God, with beginner’s mind, shaped the world with curiosity, openness, and playfulness. In this vision, the world arises from a Holy Fool’s exploration, experimentation, and delight in the act of creation. . . . This version of God relishes the clutter, mess, and fecundity that accompany chaos and void. It is from here that starlight and starlings, redwoods and rivers emerge: from the generative mess and confusion of creation, the place of everything and nothing. . . . God as Holy Fool acts as improv partner with the elements, their play together causing a co-arising of creation.”

-- Rabbi Adina Allen, cofounder and creative director, Jewish Studio Project, and Pat B. Allen, author, artist, art therapist and teacher. “God as Holy Fool: Embracing the Chaos of Creation”

<https://ayinpress.org/god-as-holy-fool-embracing-the-chaos-of-creation/>

The Fool Tarot Card:

“On The Fool Tarot card, a young man stands on the edge of a cliff, without a care in the world, as he sets out on a new adventure. He is gazing upwards toward the sky (and the Universe) and is seemingly unaware that he is about to skip off a precipice into the unknown. Over his shoulder rests a modest knapsack containing everything he needs – which isn’t much (let’s say he’s a minimalist). The white rose in his left hand represents his purity and innocence. And at his feet is a small white dog, representing loyalty and protection, that encourages him to charge forward and learn the lessons he came to learn. The mountains behind The Fool symbolize the challenges yet to come.”

<https://www.biddytarot.com/tarot-card-meanings/major-arcana/fool/>

The Trickster as Archetype

“Almost all non-literate mythology has a trickster-hero of some kind. ... And there’s a very special property in the trickster: he always breaks in, just as the unconscious does, to trip up the rational situation. He’s both a fool and someone who’s beyond the system. And the trickster represents all those possibilities of life that your mind hasn’t decided it wants to deal with. The mind structures a lifestyle, and the fool or trickster represents another whole range of possibilities. He doesn’t respect the values that you’ve set up for yourself, and smashes them.”

-- Joseph Campbell, author, professor in *An Open Life: Joseph Campbell in Conversation with Michael Toms*. <https://www.jcf.org/works/quote/almost-all-non-literate-mythology-has-a-trickster-hero/>

Russian Orthodox ‘holy fool’

“*Iurodstvo* is the Russian word for the idea of “holy foolishness” for Christ’s sake. It’s a form of asceticism that has been practiced within the Russian Orthodox church for centuries.”

-- Rich Heffern. <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/earthbeat/eco-catholic/more-about-holy-fool>

God Chose Foolish Things

“In his first letter to the Christian community of Corinth, Paul writes, ‘But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.’ What does this mean?” . . .

“So Paul told them, ‘If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.’” . . .

“If we are lucky, we will be more than simple fools; we will be holy ones. Jesus, clowns, monks, tricksters all remind us to open our hearts to the joy in life so we might find those things that remain: faith, hope, and love.”

Rev. Barbara E. Stevens, UU minister. <https://urcpdx.org/jesus-holy-fool/>

Cloud Cuckoo Land, by Anthony Doerr

Set in Constantinople in the fifteenth century, in a small town in present-day Idaho, and on an interstellar spaceship decades from now, Doerr's novel is a story about dreamers & misfits, on the cusp of adulthood undertaking perilous quests. They each find resilience & hope in an ancient story. In *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, a tapestry of times & places reflects our vast interconnectedness - with other species, with each other, with those who lived before us, & with those who will be here after we're gone. Each protagonist struggles against the norms of their society – the Holy Roman Church, developers destroying habitats, the 1940s anti-LGBTQ+ society, and a utopia that imprisons & stifles curiosity. Each finds solace & clues to their quests in the ancient Greek story of Aethon, known to his neighbors as “a dull-witted, mutton-headed lamebrain” and his quest to find the legendary *Cloud Cuckoo Land*. This novel within a novel intertwines all their lives in unexpected ways... Reviewed by Mary Hammele.

<https://catalogplus.libraryweb.org/?section=search&term=Cloud%20Cuckoo%20Land>

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56783258-cloud-cuckoo-land>