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APRIL FOOL

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Some years ago now I saw a remarkable report on ABC television about an imported fishing rod from Japan that had a dial on it on which you could select a fish and then it would help you to catch whatever you selected. It was called Dial a fish. The reporter demonstrated on the Port Noarlunga jetty in South Australia. Needless to say it created a lot of interest and the ABC switchboard was jammed the following day with inquiries.

Of course the program went to air on April the 1st and the following night the truth was revealed. April Fool's Day, it's a time for playing practical jokes on people. There's a bit of a joker in each of us and even young children love using the oldest joke of all. Hey dad your shoelace is untied! No one is quite sure how or when it all started. Some suggest that it began with Noah's decision to send the dove from the Ark in a fruitless mission to find some dry land. Students of Roman history saw that it all began with a festival of the equinox. This is a time of unreliable weather, a time when nature fools us with its changes. But it seems to me that it's not just April 1st that fools our television weather people! Others argue it all began when the French adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1564 and shifted New Year's Day from April the 1st to January the 1st. Of course it took a while for lots of ordinary people to catch up and those who had their end of Year's parties on the wrong day were known as April Fools. I like making other people look foolish sometimes but I hate it when I'm on the receiving end. I guess that makes me normal. A fool is someone who is out of step with the rest of the world. A person who marches to the beat of a different drum. And no one likes to be different. The one who is wrong. The fool.

People said Jesus was a fool. Crowds were coming to him to hear his message about God's love. Sick and crippled people pressed on him to be healed. Teachers of the law were shocked by his disrespect for their religious laws and traditions. The Gospel of Mark reports when his family heard about what he was doing they set out to get him because people were saying he's gone mad. Some teachers of the law were saying he has Beelzebub the devil in him. They saw Jesus as a fool. Anyone who taught love and peace and forgiveness in the uncompromising unconditional way that he did must be a fool. It's foolish to attack the privilege and pompous self-righteousness of the rich. It's foolish to defend the right of the hungry and poor for what can they offer in return. They saw Jesus as a fool. They couldn't understand him. He was out of step with the world. So they disposed of him quickly and quietly and crucified him on a hill outside of Jerusalem. But the ultimate in foolishness was that his followers went around a few days later saying he is risen from the dead and that he had appeared to them, spoken to them and eaten with them, a dead man, a dead messiah, alive! Talk about Dial a Fish and April Fools! The message about Christ's death on a cross is nonsense to those who are being lost, says St. Paul in the Bible. But for us who are being saved it is God's power. God decided to save those who believe by means of the foolish message we preach. We proclaim Christ on the cross, by him we are put right with God. We become God's holy people and are set free.

In the musical Godspell Jesus is portrayed as a clown, the foolish one who pokes holes in the phony values of a glittering world. A clown who asks the awkward questions about the life and death we spend a lifetime running away from. A clown who fills the world with the laughter of new life, who opens graves and gives his peace. There's a lot of old jokes about lunatic asylums all of which have the same punchline. Are the fools the ones who live inside the walls or the people who come to visit them. April fools day is a good excuse for stepping back from the routines and empty patterns of daily life that so easily deceive us and enslave us. A good time to pause in our consuming and ask some serious questions about the meaning of life. A good excuse to do something foolish and listen to a different message and some different answers. I believe the meaning of life is to be found in God in the love and forgiveness he offers us all through Jesus Christ. He gives us a new beginning after defeat and failure. A new way of living your life. Maybe you've never belonged anywhere ever before. Maybe you've always been on the outside looking in. There is a place for you. Jesus gives you his word. He has made it certain. The really foolish thing is not to take him at his word.