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Fools

John Steven Paul
Valparaiso University

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Fools

A liturgical drama based on Micah 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, and Matthew 5: 1-12

A play for actors and singers by John Steven Paul

Developed in workshop by Soul Purpose,

The Liturgical Drama Troupe of the Valparaiso University Theatre

First performance, January 30, 2005

Characters:

MICAH, *a clown*

MATTHEW, *his father*

PAULINE, *his sister*

JERRY, *a factory supervisor*

MICAH:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Prologue.

PAULINE, outside on a public square, preaching.

PAULINE:

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.

Scene One.

Night. Father and Son at home.

The kitchen of a modest house. MICAH is changing out of a circus clown suit. MATTHEW enters taking off his winter outerwear.

MATTHEW:

Where's your sister?

MICAH:

She isn't home yet, or at least I haven't seen her.

MATTHEW:

It's getting late. *(no answer)* She's later tonight than she usually is. *(no answer)* I wish she'd call it a day when it gets dark. *(no answer)* I don't like her being out so late. It's not safe. *(no answer)* I feel like I'm talking to myself here.

MICAH:

She's a grown woman, Dad. She can take care of herself.

MATTHEW:

She never learned how to dress herself. Never think to wear a heavy coat. It's cold out there. January.

MICAH:

She wears layers. Layers keep you warmer than a coat.

MATTHEW:

I bought her a big coat. A down coat. With feathers or fibers or something in it.

MICAH:

(jokingly) Maybe she's just testing you to see how many times she can get you to tell her to take a coat. Truth is, Dad, when Pauline finds a coat, she gives it away to people on the street.

MATTHEW:

She comes home so cold; she goes straight to a cup of tea. Standing in the wind all day. All I ask is a coat and a hat. It's like she doesn't even hear me.

MICAH:

Oh, she hears you. But that doesn't mean she is going to do what you say.

MATTHEW:

That seems to be the case with both my children.

MICAH:

When have I *ever* given you cause to doubt me, Dad?

MATTHEW:

Let's start with the day you left for that clown college in Florida. We send you four years to the university and then you say you need to go to clown college. What was I supposed to think then?

MICAH:

Just think of it as graduate school.

MATTHEW:

Well, at least it got you a job. You got enough money for work clothes and car fare and you work inside. Pauline wanders the streets talking to everyone who comes her way. Something could happen to her. There's nuts out there. She has no idea the kind of people who are hanging around that square, for instance. They're just waiting to prey on her.

MICAH:

(playing with words) They're not praying with her, Dad; they're persecuting her.

MATTHEW:

Whatever, smart guy.

MICAH:

It's part of the job, just like the suit *(gesturing to the clown suit)* is a part of mine. Could you really expect her to not be out there? It's like clowns come out of a tiny car in the circus, not Shakespearean actors. That's just the way it is.

MATTHEW:

If that's the way it is, I don't like it. I mean, I think it is a great thing that she is talking about Jesus, that's what your mother and I taught her to do. Tell *everyone*, you know. But it's the way she does it –

MICAH:

You want her to change her style?

MATTHEW:

She stands there and yells. People yell back at her. She told me the other day that a man actually spit on her. Spit on her! That kind of hatred's dangerous.

MICAH:

She told me that story. Has she told you the other stories? About the people she gets into shelters and clinics, about the ones who love her for listening to them, for giving them a buck or two for soup or coffee, or even one of those little, green New Testaments she hands out. She keep son going out there. You must admire her resolve.

MATTHEW:

Resolve! It's so much foolishness, if you ask me. She should take a look at getting a regular job. If she wants to be a minister, go to a church. Hey, I know, a job just opened up at the factory in the office. She'd be perfect for it. She'd get to know people; she could preach to them there.

MICAH:

You said the same thing to me after I came back from school. "An assistant manager position just opened up at the factory. They were going to hire the owner's nephew, but something fell through. I think you would be perfect for the job. You could clown around at company parties."

MATTHEW:

Well, you would've been perfect. You can't blame me for wanting my kids to have good jobs.

MICAH:

We do.

MATTHEW:

One a clown and one a Jesus-freak.

MICAH:

You wouldn't be equating the two, would you, Dad?

MATTHEW:

They're both kind of funny jobs, you have to admit. The one's supposed to be funny; the other is, well...

MICAH:

What is it?

MATTHEW:

Strange. It's a strange thing for a girl to be doing.

MICAH:

It's a strange world.

MATTHEW:

Shy's she doing it, Mike?

MICAH:

She thinks it's what God wants her to do. No, she's sure this is what God wants her to do.

MATTHEW:

Then she's lucky.

MICAH:

Lucky?

MATTHEW:

Lucky to know what "God wants her to do." I wish I knew. When your mother was alive and you kids were little, I knew what God expected of me. Every day pretty much the same. Go to work for eight hours. Come home in time for supper. Do a little roughhousing with you two. Wash up. Sit down. Say a prayer. Eat. Read the paper or watch TV. Check your homework. Put the two of you to bed. Next morning, same thing. On weekends it was work on the house, take you to ball games and club meetings. Go to church. Get some rest for Monday and start all over again. Then your mom died and everything changed. You went down to Florida. Pauline had a real hard time for a while, but now – I guess you're right – she knows exactly what she's doing. Maybe that's what bothers me: she knows and I don't. What do you think God wants me to do, Mike? Got any idea?

MICAH:

I think God wants you to have these little conversations with me.

Interlude: Pauline Preaching.

PAULINE:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Scene Two.

3:30 pm. MATTHEW and JERRY at work.

*Late afternoon at the plant where MATTHEW works.
MATTHEW is at a work bench repairing a hand tool.*

JERRY, MATTHEW's supervisor, enters.

JERRY:

Matt, you read the new safety memo posted today?

MATTHEW:

The one says be careful not to fall down, skin my knee?

JERRY:

Very funny. Safety's number one around here now and you got the wrong shoes.

MATTHEW:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JERRY:

By t'morra or you'll be getting a little more time off than you planned.

MATTHEW:

Yes, Ma'am.

JERRY:

You got a new temp comin' in later. A nice kid.

MATTHEW:

How come? I thought we weren't getting extra help.

JERRY:

He's taking the Indian girl's place.

MATTHEW:

Devi?

JERRY:

Whatever. Yeah.

MATTHEW:

Why? She was expecting to go full time.

JERRY:

She was three days short of it. I decided we could do better for a full-timer. And I think this kid may be just the ticket.

MATTHEW:

C'mon, Jerry. Devi was good. Hard worker straight through the shift. No nonsense. On time every day. What do you want?

JERRY:

I want somebody who talks English.

MATTHEW:

Devi speaks English.

JERRY:

Not so's I could understand it. She talks India-English.

MATTHEW:

It's called an accent. You're half-deaf.

JERRY:

What?

MATTHEW:

Nothing.

JERRY:

Look, it doesn't make sense; it's not safe. I don't have to tell you that we get in life or death situations on the floor here. Trucks and booms and machines all over the place. A person gets lost or falls down, suddenly they get run into and they're hurt bad or killed. We need somebody who can tell you to *duck* in language you can make out. For all I know, she can't understand us either.

MATTHEW:

Who's "us"?

JERRY:

Americans.

MATTHEW:

Jerry. Have a heart. The poor kid's had it rough. She's been kicked around. She has little kids of her own, you know. And no husband. She needs this job.

JERRY:

Hey, let it go now. She made good money here. If she's smart, she saved some.

MATTHEW:

Jerry –

JERRY:

She'll find something else. You know how they are. They got big families; they take care of their own. By this time next week she'll be working at a gas station. You'll see.

MATTHEW:

This isn't right. You can't just let somebody go because you don't like who they are or where they're from.

JERRY:

You're wrong. It's not about who I like; it's whose best on the floor. Besides, I already did it. She's lucky she worked here as long as she did. (*She begins to walk away.*)

MATTHEW:

Jerry! What you did was wrong. The girl deserved the full-time job. I won't stand for this.

JERRY:

What are you going to *do* about it?

MATTHEW:

What are *you* going to do about it?

JERRY:

I'm gonna start breaking in the new guy. You?

MATTHEW:

I'm going upstairs and tell 'em what I think.

JERRY:

You won't go upstairs.

MATTHEW:

I will.

JERRY:

You won't because about halfway up you'll start to think about what it will mean to be on my bad side. You'll remember what happened to Pavlick two years ago. You'll count how many little favors I've done for you over five years and you'll decide you like that kind of treatment and you'll come to your senses and hustle back down here and make friends with our new temporary employee. You'll show him the ropes and you'll let him know what's expected around here. I know you, Matt.

MATTHEW:

(*after a minute*) 'Scuse me. (*he exits past her*)

JERRY:

You go up there and you'll never catch another break as long as I'm your super.

Scene Three.

Late in the day. The street. PAULINE preaching.

PAULINE: For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe –

HECKLER A:

Fool!

PAULINE:

For Jews demand signs –

HECKLER B:

Hey preacher, show us a sign (*laughter*).

PAULINE:

and Greeks desire wisdom –

HECKLER C:

So you got all the answers? Give us a few. Make 'em good ones.

PAULINE:

but we proclaim Christ crucified –

HECKLER A:

Jesus-freak!

PAULINE:

For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is than human strength.

MATTHEW:

(waving a pink slip in the air) I played the fol big time today and now I'm going to pay for it.

PAULINE:

God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are –

MATTHEW:

Don't call me that. Don't call me "low and despised." I'm your father. Don't call me names.

PAULINE:

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth –

MATTHEW:

Stop it, Pauline. I'm your father, not your brother. I'm a fool. Your brother's a, but at least he's got a job.

PAULINE:

Dad... what are you doing here?

MATTHEW:

I hear you help people find the way. Well, I think I've lost the way. I thought I always knew what to do. But now I don't. I don't even have a place to work.

PAULINE:

Dad, what's happened? What's that paper?

MATTHEW:

It says I'm fired. Or something nicer: "furloughed."

PAULINE:

After twenty-seven years? For what?

MATTHEW:

Because I did a stupid thing that I thought was the right thing. I stood up for somebody who was getting screwed at the mill.

PAULINE:

You did the right thing.

MATTHEW:

And she got fired too. So much for seniority. So much for clout. So much for “strength through solidarity.”

PAULINE:

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are –

MATTHEW:

Stop preaching at me, Pauline. Stop spraying me with the Bible. I taught you, remember? I and your mother took you to church, don't forget it. You know, it's easy, what you're doing. (*No response from PAULINE.*) I know it seems like it's hard standing out here in the cold and the rain without a coat or hat and screaming out the Gospel or whatever until you're hoarse and sick and tired. And people make fun of you and spit on you. But I really DID it, for once. I did the right thing, the hard thing. And this (*waving the paper*) is where it got me.

PAULINE:

so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'

MATTHEW:

I'm not boasting. I'm just showing you; this is what I've got. This is all I've got. Not much to boast about.

PAULINE:

(*indicating herself*) This is all I've got, Dad. Nothing to boast about. (*She walks off.*)

MATTHEW:

Pauline. See you at home later?

Scene Four.

Morning. Father and Son at home.

*The kitchen. MATTHEW washing dishes. MICAH enters.
His father does not acknowledge him.*

MICAH:

(after a little while) Where's, uh, my sister?

MATTHEW:

She isn't up yet, or at least I haven't seen her.

MICAH:

It's getting late. *(no answer)* She's later this morning than she usually is. *(no answer)* I wish she'd call it a day when it gets dark. *(no answer)* I don't like her being out so late. It's not safe. *(no answer)* I feel like I'm talking to myself here.

MATTHEW:

(realizing) Are you making fun of me?

MICAH:

Me? Never.

MATTHEW:

Where were you last night? I got home and you weren't around.

MICAH:

You were late. I went to bed. I hurt myself climbing out of the Volkswagen. I left at the intermission.

MATTHEW:

What a job!

MICAH:

There you go; that's the kind of talk I'm used to. Where were *you* last night?

MATTHEW:

I had a long day yesterday. I did a fool thing at work. Got me laid off.

MICAH:

My gosh! What?

MATTHEW:

I didn't like the way one of our temporary workers was being treated. My supervisor didn't see it the way I did. So, I went to the management office and had my say.

MICAH:

They hear you?

MATTHEW:

They listened; they let the temp go anyway; and, a few hours later, I got a furlough slip.

MICAH:

You did the right thing, Dad. The *just* thing.

MATTHEW:

I guess. It wasn't such a big deal. I know when someone's getting... what was your word? "Persecuted"? You *must not* let stuff like that go on, Micah.

MICAH:

Oh, so it's "Micah" now. You haven't called me that for a while.

MATTHEW:

I've just been thinking. Your mother named you. You were named for an Old Testament prophet.

MICAH:

I know.

MATTHEW:

Your mother liked that verse that goes, “do justice and walk humbly with your God.”

MICAH:

“What does the Lord require of you... ?”

MATTHEW:

“Do justice...” and, uh...

MICAH:

“Love kindness”

MATTHEW:

(getting an idea) Yeah, And walk humbly with your God. *(goes to put his coat on)*

MICAH:

Dad. *(Takes a red rubber clown nose out of his pocket and tosses it to MATTHEW.)*

MATTHEW:

What’s this?

MICAH:

Put it on. Like this. *(shows his father how to put it on. MATTHEW does so.)* It suits you.

MATTHEW:

I don’t think so. *(Takes the nose off. Exits.)*

Scene Five.

Morning. The street. PAULINE preaching.

PAULINE:

He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’

MATTHEW enters wearing the clown nose. She acknowledges him with a querulous smile. He walks toward PAULINE, takes off his heavy coat and puts it around her. He embraces her. She responds. He walks off.

When MATTHEW is out of sight, PAULINE puts her hands in the coat pockets and discovers a clown nose.

She puts it on.

THE END