

Today we're thinking 'out of the box'!

(Show Jack in the Box)

What's 'out of the box'? A clown.

The clown has commonly been referred to as the 'lord of disorder' or of 'misrule'. Did you know? - The 'fool' or 'clown' was the only one at the medieval royal court who could tell the truth, *so long* as it made the king laugh. A precarious existence! The key to understanding the clown's performance is an ambiguity(it could mean several things), and a paradox (it could be mutually contradictory), that is, *at the same time*, both disturbing and liberating – and so, as you 'get it', you laugh.

I want to suggest **that** is also key to understanding how 'gospel' is good news – it is, at the same time, disturbing and liberating – and, on the good days, you LOL (laugh-out-loud)!

Let me point to the evidence. First, in the Gospel reading, we heard about a leader of a synagogue - a highly respectable social position - falling at the feet of an unknown travelling preacher. This is 'out of the box' behaviour – it contradicted what Jewish society would have told him was right, but his love for his sick daughter was such that it just made a nonsense of social convention. Equally, the woman suffering long-term haemorrhaging was an outcast from society. Yet she reached out and **touched** Jesus - a religious leader. This 'touching' was out of order within respectable Jewish society, and Jesus should have been angry. But, in fact, Jesus was 'out of the box' too - his unthinking response was healing for her. Such was his closeness to God that the compassion just flowed out of him – and there is just no power like spontaneous love for healing!!

Then (let's go further),there is the story in our first reading of David's love overflowing spontaneously in tears, as he weeps, uncontrollably, over the death of his friend, Jonathan. Let me remind you: Jonathan was the king's son and heir; David was simply the ruddy, fresh-faced, bright-eyed youngest son, who when Samuel comes looking for a new king, is the forgotten one, outside with the sheep. How he later came to King Saul's notice is told in different ways. Perhaps it was his prowess with the sling in dispatching Goliath the

Philistine. Perhaps it was his skill as a musician, able to soothe Saul when fits of depression overwhelmed him. Perhaps both – and thus, King Saul came to love David. And so did his children: his son Jonathan, and Michal his daughter, whom David married. And all was sweetness and light until Saul's fortunes began to wane, and David's star rose higher: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands!', *they* said. So envy, jealousy, rivalry and fear are all there! Then, as things began to fall apart for his father, Jonathan made a covenant of loyalty to David. He gave to David his robe, his armour, his sword, his bow and his belt. There's no subtlety: Symbolically, the king's son was renouncing his claim to the throne - and giving it to David. When Jonathan died with his father in battle, David poured out his grief for his dead friend, who had been so close to him.

Let's pause to ask: What is it to have friends? – a little story:

The minister of a teetotal chapel liked to discretely enjoy the odd drink with his friend, and their shared passion was for peach brandy. One day, his friend told the minister that he had to thank him for the peach brandy from the pulpit the next Sunday. Without fully thinking about it, for the delicious peach brandy had flowed generously, the minister agreed. However, come the next Sunday, he suddenly remembered, with angst, that he had promised to thank his friend *in public*. The minister climbed into the pulpit, hesitated, and said, "Before we begin, I would very much like to thank my friend, Joe, for his kind gift of peaches ... and for the spirit in which they were given!"

Indeed, Jesus shocked some of the 'holy' people of his day by drinking and eating with his friends (sometimes a disreputable gathering ...), rather more than was thought 'proper', and St John, when writing his Gospel, told of Jesus changing water into wine – vastly more than was needed!

And it was the same St John who 'the beloved disciple', the friend next to Jesus at the last supper. Then, ultimately, Jesus, from the cross, trusted his friend with looking after his mother. Do you see, there is a theme here: And when Jesus says that there is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friend, he raises friendship to the highest and noblest level. We see, also, that at creation God came into the garden looking for the man and the woman – why? -because *God looked for friendship*. Take it further; in the upper room,

that place of friendship, betrayal and truth, maybe Jesus deliberately echoes the actions of Jonathan. Like him, Jesus is the King's Son. Like him, he takes off his robe and, in washing sweaty feet, abases himself for those he loves and calls his friends so that he may give them all he has. And he does that on the cross.

Paul's Letter to the Philippians tells how Jesus 'laid aside his glory' in self-emptying. God so loves the world: it costs him *everything*.

Hence, in the light of this cosmic generosity, Paul's rant to the Corinthians about their embarrassingly low levels of giving – that's what that's about!

Paul urges generous giving simply because this is the 'out of the box', recklessly loving, nature of God, in which we share.

So – for me, that's good news: God's very being is reckless generosity (out of the box generosity) and we are simply made in God's image, and we are 'wired-up'(big-time) for **friendship**. Remember: God wants each of us as a friend! And God will hold us, together, in God's healing friendship beyond the worn-outness of this earth, from glory to glory – till God's Kingdom come: even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.