

## Clowning around

Circuses are for children of every age.

When you were a kid, I bet you thought about running away to join the circus, especially when you had an argument with your parents. Well, coming together as church is a bit like joining a circus.

- At first, it seems to be very glamorous - something worth running away from home to join.
- But once you get there, you find that there's a lot to be learned.
- The church, like the circus, operates on the fringes of society, pitching the bigtop wherever it can find a welcoming space.
- It contains lots of different people with individual gifts.
- Sometimes disabled people, or those for whom the world a hostile place, who find a safe home there, and who are worth their weight in gold to the rest of the circus family.
- Everyone pulls their weight, from those who perform to those who muck out the animal pens or cook the meals, and tasks are often shared.

Then there are the performers, people who work hard at perfecting their abilities; trapeze artists, high wire acts, lion tamers, acrobats. Important, spectacular artists, drawing the crowds in.

But you can't have a circus without clowns.

Clowns are not to be despised. They fulfil an important function in the circus.

- Each clown's face is unique. It is painted on with care.
- Clowns can discern pain in people and know exactly how to touch them with humour to ease it and bring about healing.
- Clowns don't confine themselves to the ring. They go out into the audience.
- Clowns use all sorts of crazy props - square-wheeled bicycles, buckets full of confetti, klaxon horns, party whistles, huge flowers that squirt water - things that appear trivial or useless, but with a creative lick of bright paint or fabric serve brilliantly.
- Because they are disguised with stage make up, clowns don't look for the applause, just the pleasure of being among and with the people and making them laugh.
- The clown act may seem to be random, but it takes quite a bit of skill, and needs to be polished.

- Clowns are serious about their performance, but they don't take themselves seriously.

The beautiful thing about clowns is that they serve not only the audience, but the rest of the circus community. In fact, they *always* work in community.

In clowns we are reminded that our gifts are freely given, not earned; that while we have a responsibility to work towards perfection of our high wire acts, our performance mustn't be just for the applause, or an effort to somehow earn the love of the Ringmaster.

The gentle art of clowning teaches us that, despite the absurdity of our humanity, we *are\_already* in his love, and that love surpasses any applause we might earn from the audience.

Each one of us has our own gift, our 'high wire' act, that leaves the audience (the rest of us) gasping in awe. But clowns let us know that we should not take ourselves too seriously, to the point that we can't encourage each other in our giftedness.

This is a very important gift in itself - this gift of encouragement, which is:

*'The art of instilling courage in another, enabling them to move forward, confident in their giftedness.'* \*

A Taize Brother once told me that preparation for worship was like being a servant in house. You prepared the meal, laid the table, arranged the flowers and made everything ready for the guests. You welcomed the guests when they arrived, but then you withdrew and allowed the guest and host to get on with deepening their relationship with the Host.

Clowns invite us into the big top to meet the Ringmaster. With humour and mime, we are drawn into a world of colour and candles and song and even sermons, where God opens up his tent space just for us.

But more than that, he invites us to join his circus, the church.

He invites you to bring *your* gifts to wow the audiences who are drawn to the bigtop. But he also invites us all to be big kids, to clown around and teach others out there that it's OK to be the crazy, funny, absurd human being that they are, because the Ringmaster loves them to bits.

\*Sr. Sandra Sears CSBC

Remember that Jesus pitched his tent among us, calling us to run away and join his circus, and learn the art of clowning from him, so that we could get out among the audience and encourage them to recognise his love for them.

What a privilege! And fancy having so much fun at the same time!

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*Jesus,  
you come to us  
wearing the big, flat feet of humanity,  
yellow check pants (several sizes too big)  
and a huge floral buttonhole  
that squirts water.*

*Your face is made up  
to reflect ours and mirror our needs,  
and you tell funny, subversive stories  
that sneak under the radar of our defences,  
popping the balloons of our pretentiousness,  
inviting us to laugh at ourselves.*

*You surprise us  
with flowers that appear out of a handkerchief;  
call us to attention  
with a klaxon horn.*

*And better still,  
you invite us to run away to join your circus,  
to learn the art of clowning  
in the service of the Ringmaster.  
To do what you do.  
To be what you are.*

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## The Greatest Show on Earth!

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