

Sermon Transcript

“Fools, Foolishness, and Folly”

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“O Wah - Ta Goo – Siam.”

Ever since we became aware of our existence, we wonder: Who am I? What is my purpose?

“O Wah - Ta Goo – Siam.”

These are holy words - words that might led us to the answer of life’s most important questions.

“O Wah - Ta Goo – Siam.”

Join me! Feel the power of these words!

“O Wah - Ta Goo – Siam.”

Everyone. Faster now.

“O Wah – Ta Goo – Siam.” Faster!

What am I?”

Oh what a goose I am – what a crazy fool I am!

Indeed, what silly geese we all are sometimes, as we seek to make sense of life.

The next time you're stressed out, or feeling too serious, repeat (or have someone else repeat): "Oh Wah - Ta Goo – Siam." Maybe it'll give you some perspective or at least a good laugh.

If you're here for the first time, wondering "What the...?" know that this is not a "regular" service. Today is April Fools Day. And as author Wes Nisker, says "...we live in a world of too much seriousness ... and much of our serious behavior is ritualized and rationalized nonsense" (3).

Thus, we need April Fools and Fools in general, such as the Zen Master who asks, "Where can I find a man who has forgotten words? I would like to have a word with him."

We need madmen such as Lao Tzu, the Buddha, and Jesus – all challengers to conventional truth, all masters of the foolish," (Nisker, 36) all willing to call us "silly geese." These so called fools play with us and expanding our minds with their folly and parables, dismantling our idols of seriousness and certainty.

Speaking of play, have you heard of the game "Hink Pink?" You think of two words that rhyme and then make up a clue about them. For example, "Fat Cat." Each word is one syllable, so it's a hink pink. If each word was two syllables, it would be a hinky pinky. If each word was three syllables, it would be a hinkity pinkity.

So: "fat cat." It's a hink pink, and the clue would be: an "overweight feline." Fat Cat.

Are you with me? Here's another one, but it's a visual clue (hold up apple). It's a hinky pinky. A fruit that belongs in a small place of worship. "Chapel Apple."

Speaking of worship, here's a hink pink: "A hymn that goes on and on." "Long Song."

Are we having fun yet, because despite the alarming amount of time we spend being seriousness, we're built for play and creativity. Not so sure? Think of it this way: the universe, which we are an intimate part of, has been playing for 15 billion years.

Ever since the big bang, the Universe has playfully and magically unfolded as galaxies, stars, and planets. Ever since our planet formed, the sun's energy has playfully turned into such things as grass, geraniums, giraffes, dinosaurs, human beings, you!

I call this godly play, because at the heart of universe, there seems to be a playful, creative, even loving, force, asking, "What new life can be created?" Still not convinced about Godly play?

Listen to this story, from the Institute for Play.

On a late October day on the Canadian tundra next to the cold but unfrozen Hudson Bay, it looked like a beautiful young Husky was about to become one dead dog. Hudson, the name of the Husky, was comfortably lounging on a fresh bed of snow, tethered on a long chain. Suddenly, out on the white horizon, there appeared a 1200 pound male polar bear.

A hungry polar bear.

Biologists had been tracking and recording the movements of this and other bears in the area. They had observed that this particular bear and his companions had not eaten for nearly four months because ice had not yet formed on the bay, and the bears could not hunt their favorite prey—seals.

As the bear moved toward him, Hudson, who obviously had never been warned about hungry polar bears, didn't try to flee, bare his teeth, or howl in terror.

Instead, Hudson wagged his tail, grinned a doggy grin, and crouched in a bow to the bear, signaling an invitation to play. If you have a dog, you probably know this sign.

To the amazement of the biologists, examination of the photographs they were taking showed that the bear approached Hudson also signaling his intention to play with a characteristic loose walk, playfully inviting gestures and facial expressions.

Within seconds, the enormous bear and North America's luckiest dog were wrestling and cavorting in the snow in front of the cameras of the amazed scientists.

At one point, the bear wrapped himself like a white wool comforter around the Husky in an embrace.

The polar bear returned several times to play over the next few weeks, until the ice formed on the bay and he was able to hunt a seal meal.

(A hink pink, for those keeping track.)

This desire to “play” seems to be at the heart of the things. But you wouldn’t guess that from the seriousness of most religions. Thanks in part to our Puritans’ ancestors and their strict work ethic, play has more negative connotations than positive.

Clearly, this is not the case when we’re young, but as we age, we only play after we finish work and our to-do list. (Unless we’re around babies, then we start action we’re two, playing peek a-boo, and other games.) But in many ways, organized religion has done a good job of putting the kibosh on fun and play with threats of hell and heavy dogma.

Here’s a hinkity pinkity to honor this dark side of religion. The clue is: A scary/frightening clergy person. “Sinister Minister.”

These “sinister ministers,” should be charged with the high crime of another hinky pinky, of using the “Holy Scriptures in a slanderous way, to hurt the reputation of another.” “Bible Libel.”

It is the holy fools, the divine madmen, who keep the Sinister Ministers and Bible Libel at bay, reminding us to take ourselves less seriously. As author Anne Lamott, a holy fool in her own right, reminds us, “No one says on their death bed, ‘I wish I had worked more. And harder. Stayed at the office later.’” No. People wish they’d have played more – with friends, children, babies.

So if you’re feeling stressed and discombobulated, play, not more work, might be what re-comboblates you (I just made that word up).

In fact, there's an anecdotal story told about a summit meeting between Prime Minister Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan. It wasn't going well and they had failed to reach agreement on nuclear (nuke li urh) disarmament.

Despite this, the two had a final breakfast together. Reagan began the meal by telling American jokes, which were reciprocated by Russian jokes, to everyone's delight and amusement. Reagan told the one about,

An old Russian woman who goes into the Kremlin, gets an audience with Gorbachev and says, "In America anyone can go to the White House, walk up to Reagan's desk and say, 'I don't like the way you are running the country.'"

Gorbachev replied, "You know, you can do the same thing in the Soviet Union. You can go into the Kremlin, walk up to my desk and say 'I don't like the way Reagan is running his country.'"

from: <http://home.comcast.net/~sharonday7/Presidents/AP03SO.htm>

Reagan and Gorbachev swapped jokes and no business was discussed at all. But surprisingly, after breakfast, the summit was resumed by mutual agreement, and was ultimately successful. There were many factors to this, but part of it was the magic of play.

So what does this mean for us, today? For humans and others, play can be a universal training course that builds trust. If you feel safe enough to play with another, then over time, trust is formed. Trust builds intimacy, cooperation, and creativity. It can work between nations, co-workers, spouses, family members, neighbors, or pets (Meeker).

You know, the not so funny thing is, we've got the war and the work ethic down pat. Maybe we need, as author Joseph Meeker suggests, a play ethic. Something that reminds us of the importance of play, that the point of play is to play. In play, everyone can be equal and roles can change. Rules are negotiable from moment to moment. And play produces strength and skill for the players, and stimulates the imagination.

Imagine a family game of soccer – bigger members slow down, little ones are given a chance. All sorts of boundaries and roles are changed in order to play together. A play ethic that encourages mutual playfulness and creativity might help us respond, in a whole new way, to the failures, challenges, and tough decisions of life.

And surely, with 6 billion people and counting, as we face unprecedented challenges and opportunities in our global community, play is what the world needs more than anything else. So I say to the clowns, pranksters, jokesters, and fools from all parts of the world, “Oh Wah Ta Goo Siam!”

Bring it on! We’re ready for creative play, holy play, Godly play.

Let’s play! Amen.