

Preach, brother

By

Fernando Segall

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... Okay, you should know that English is this playwright's second language (or third? Or fifth?) because it adds something subtle and quite wonderful to the mix. You might not be aware of it if you jumped right into the play and skipped the preamble because the play is that smooth. It's worth pointing out because playwright Fernando Buzhar Segall's use of language in dialogue is as impeccable as his storytelling. The rhythms and syntax of the characters in the Preach, brother are unique to each other as well as to Segall's own voice and accent. Embracing the palette of another language is a gift, forcing the writer to search for new words and create juxtapositions outside of the box, but Segall's play is also clearly imbued by a talent for writing in any language he chooses. And now, let's get to the premise of the script at hand. In Segall's introduction we learn that the play was inspired by true events and personages in the thriving realm of evangelical megachurches in Brazil. While there are regional and cultural elements of the play, the themes are universal and the church in Preach, brother doesn't seem that far off from churches that have popped up on other continents with similar messaging tactics. This branch of Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, however, has managed to push its reach to the stratosphere of our imaginations and into our homes. That's right, it's formed a media company with twelve church-driven channels to keep the church logo and programming on our televisions twenty-four seven. There are channels that provide church-friendly and family-friendly content - there's even a channel that plays the "Passion of Christ" all the time. Igreja Universal's programming comes to members of the church "guilt free" at the low price of \$29.99 per month. It's a holy bargain! Churchgoers like MATTHEW won't even notice the subscription cost when it's rolled into their membership dues, but when MATTHEW's friend LUCY visits the church, she has her doubts. Even if the enigmatic BROTHER COWBOY can't convince LUCY to see the light, there are forces greater than any of us ready to show us the way. Could it be a bird? A Plane? Flying pasta?*

(Five Stars)

BROTHER COWBOY

But worry not! Cause it's tempting, I know, but here's how we're gonna help you not be tempted.

He looks at one of the wings and nods. Helper

comes in, rolling a TV stand with TV.
The screen is turned on with “Igreja
Universal’s” logo.

BROTHER COWBOY

12 channels. That’s it. That’s all you need, I don’t need more. Jesus didn’t need more than 12! Do you? My friends, I’m proud to announce our church is now a TV provider, the only, holy tv provider. That’s right!

People applaud. Lucy looks at Matthew. He’s
applauding. Helper shows the 12 channels on
the TV.

Preach, brother

An absurdist short play, that is in fact, very much so a realism short play in some things that might seem absurd but do indeed happen within the curious world of the Brazilian Evangelical community. Some of it is absurd though.

Matthew: 25, a casual goer of this church. Lucy’s boyfriend

Lucy: 25, a non believer.

Brother Cowboy: The pastor at this church. Late 40s. He’s dressed head to toes like a cowboy.

Helper: The pastor’s assistant, early 30s.

Old Lady: late 60s, a member of the church.

Man: 40s, same.

A Devil: Satanish.

A God: Will get into that later.

Setting: A branch of Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, a Brazilian megachurch franchise, that actually has a couple small branches in the US.

Note: Brazil has one of the largest evangelical populations in the world at 59 million. 4 out of the twenty richest men in Brazil are evangelical pastors, Including Edir Macedo, with a fortune of close to 3 billion dollars, and owner of the second largest TV network in Brazil. They even have their own political party, which very ironically is called, “Partido Republicano Brasileiro”, yes that’s right, “Brazilian Republican Party”.

A megachurch. The stage works as its stage. The audience works as its audience. There are actors in the audience. The stage is empty at first as we hear LUCY and MATTHEW chatting on the front row of the theatre.

MATTHEW

Thank you for doing this. I know you didn’t wanna come.

LUCY

No, I did, I did...

MATTHEW

You always say “no”...

LUCY

I was just... Procrastinating it. I know it’s a big part of your life--

MATTHEW

I wouldn’t say “big”...

LUCY

It’s a part, anyway, and I wanna be a part of.... Everything that... Is part of your life.

MATTHEW

Cute.

LUCY

Stop.

MATTHEW

Truly cute. I appreciate the effort.

LUCY

No effort whatsoever.

MATTHEW

It is, I know there's this, uh.. Stigma about it? People make fun of this, of my faith.

LUCY

No...

MATTHEW

You make fun of it all the time.

LUCY

I do not.

MATTHEW

Whenever someone asks you what's your religion, you say you pray for the "Flying Spaghetti Monster".

LUCY

Pastafarianism is a real thing ok?

He looks at her.

LUCY

It is... It's like a philosophy more than a religion I guess, it means something though...

MATTHEW

I'm shaking my head at you.

LUCY

It's not making fun of your faith specifically anyway, it's... Criticism to organized religion, any organized religion.

MATTHEW

Let's stop talking about the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

LUCY

You're the one who brought it up...

MATTHEW

I did... And I truly appreciate you being here. Trying. People can think whatever they wanna think, I just wish they'd actually try to understand it? At least once. See it for what it is and not as some... Youtube video making fun of us, making it seem like we are all crazy. And you're doing that. You're giving it a chance. And I do appreciate that.

LUCY

It's no big deal. I'm excited. To find out more about this, more about you. I'm sure it's gonna be--

"Stairway to Heaven" begins, solely played by an electric guitar.

MATTHEW

Oh! It's about to start.

It's a shortened version of the song, and after about a minute, it goes straight into the guitar's solo. HELPER appears on the stage, playing the guitar. People in the audience, including
Matthew,
go wild.

LUCY

I gotta say, this is pretty dope.

There are some scattered pyrotechnics. Finally: ziplining from the balcony onto the stage: BROTHER COWBOY. He arrives. For a moment he struggles to free himself from the zipline, but plays it cool. He runs around the stage, arms raised like "Rocky", screaming unintelligible things, high fiving the audience, as they go crazy for him. This lasts a few moments.

Helper finishes the solo and stops playing. Brother cowboy collapses centerstage after all his running. He lies on the floor, breathing heavily as people applaud. After a moment, he sits up and looks at the audience.

BROTHER COWBOY

Now that was something, huh? Wasn't that something?!

People applaud. He gets up.

BROTHER COWBOY

I am so, so happy you're all here today with me, so happy! Because it's by coming here, all of us together, that we climb that stairway to heaven, one step at a time, towards Jesus!

People applaud, Lucy does too, trying to get into it.

But of course, not all of us, good men and women, are actually able to come here. Oh yeas, sir, we are indeed privileged to be able to gather here like this, but make no mistake! All our brothers and our sisters... The hundreds, the thousands, the millions watching at home! They are all climbing these stairs with us hand in hand, yes they are. Every time you turn on that tv and see this beautiful temple of Christ, it's one more step right there. And I know it's tempting to not tune in, I know.

People in the audience make agreeing noises. 500 different TV channels. A dozen different steaming services that pile up in your credit card bill. So much content, but what is in there? Billions of different kinds of content and how many of them are actually decent? How many are about what's good, what's kind, what's right! And how many just make you fall back on those stairs?! Stray you away from God, pull you down and back! How many of these shows, are just each and every capital sin shaped up and formatted for your entertainment?!

Audience agrees.

All these violent movies that are nothing but wrath. Filled with plastic "beautiful", sinful, Hollywood people that are there just to cause lust. You watch sports and it's all about that pride, about my team, my guys being better than yours! And reality shows, don't get me started on them... So many cooking shows, so many. Hey brothers, sisters. Have you heard about that little thing called gluttony? And that's not even the worst of it... All these "keeping ups", all these "shores", and these "real housewives"... They want you to see... See their mansions, see their sinful lifestyles, and feel it, feel envy! And all the while they want you to binge. To watch and watch and watch, nonstop. They want you, my friends, to sloth, how dare they? How ill intentioned can these people be!

He stops, the audience applauds, agrees.

LUCY

He's got a point, but he forgot greed.

BROTHER COWBOY

But worry not! Cause it's tempting, I know, but here's how we're gonna help you not be tempted.

He looks at one of the wings and nods. Helper comes in, rolling a TV stand with TV.

The screen is turned on with
"Igreja Universal's" logo.

BROTHER COWBOY

12 channels. That's it. That's all you need, I don't need more. Jesus didn't need more than 12! Do you? My friends, I'm proud to announce our church is now a TV provider, the only, holy tv provider. That's right!

People applaud. Lucy looks at Matthew. He's applauding. Helper shows the 12 channels on the TV.

BROTHER COWBOY

Gone are the days of not knowing what to watch, without having to watch sinful, vile content! You got three channels just with televised services and prayers, and a channel where we answer your questions live, so that you can be close to god whenever you want, however you want! We got four channels with original, made by us, tv shows and movies! So that you can watch it without feeling guilty, knowing that these shows help you climb the stairs! Two channels for your kids, to help them learn, about Christ, about being good! One channel that we're still working on, but will be premiering by the end of the year with great content! And one channel with the "Passion of Christ" running on repeat, cause that's the one time Hollywood got it right, and it's always a good time to watch it!

People applaud and scream.

LUCY

Is this... Is this serious?

BROTHER COWBOY

And the best part? 29.99 a month. We'll come to your house, we'll install it, no extra fees! Cheaper than any other TV provider in this country, if you find a lower price we'll beat it!

LUCY

Come on, this is a little weird.

MATTHEW

Look, me and you aren't the target audience here. I guarantee you that there are people... Older people specially, who'd enjoy it. It's simpler. Made for them.

LUCY

Sure...

BROTHER COWBOY

And if you already have a membership with us, you don't even need to make an account, or sign any contract! The 29.99 will just be added to your donations and be directly deposited to the church with none of that paperwork and long phone calls.

LUCY

Membership?

BROTHER COWBOY

If this sounds interesting to you, all you gotta do is find one of my helpers at the end of the service, say you would like our TV provider, let them take a peep at your membership card and that's it! This week we'll have it installed, no headaches included!

People applaud, Brother Cowboy takes the TV away with helper. People applaud

LUCY

This... Doesn't seem legal.

MATTHEW

Stop, of course it is. A membership is... People like donating right? But so they don't have to go to the hassle of going through the... Process of donation every week... With a membership you just automatically give however much you want to give every week. Straight from your bank account to the church and... Depending of how much you give, you get some extra perks... Like T-shirts. They show you on TV during the Services... Better seats.

LUCY

(accusatorily)

These are front row seats.

MATTHEWS

Uh, yes. But it's not about that. You donate cause you want to. Cause it's right.

LUCY

This all seems pretty--

BROTHER COWBOY

(walking back on stage)

Friends! I think I've talked a lot already, I think it's time for me to be quiet, huh? It's time to hear you!

Helper comes in.

BROTHER COWBOY

You know, my right hand here, he wasn't always this good man you see in front of you.

HELPER

No, I was not.

BROTHER COWBOY

Why brother?

HELPER

I was an addict.

BROTHER COWBOY

Did you do drugs?

HELPERS

Yes.

BROTHER COWBOY

Which drugs?

HELPER

All of them.

BROTHER COWBOY

Christ almighty.

HELPER

I had to sell my mom's things... Her microwave. To pay for my addiction. At my worst I was stealing. Robbing at gunpoint.

BROTHER COWBOY

And what happened?

HELPER

I found you. And you helped me find the Lord.

BROTHER COWBOY

I get emotional whenever you say that.

HELPER

It's true. Jesus saved me. I'm clean now. I'm a brand new person. BROTHER

COWBOY

You are the person Jesus always wanted you to be. But the devil tried to drift you away

HELPER

He did.

BROTHER COWBOY

(to the audience)

Is the devil trying to drift anyone here away? CAUSE I WONT LET HIM, I WONT!
Raise your hands, raise your hands if you are wrestling with the Devil right now!

Multiple people in the audience raise their hands.

MATTHEW

You're gonna like this part.

LUCY

Will I?

Brother Cowboy picks two people to come on stage: MAN and OLD LADY. He approaches the Man. The playwright would like to reiterate that the following is almost verbatim of real footage from very popular Televangelist shows in Brazil.

BROTHER COWBOY

Have you been wrestling with the Devil, brother?

MAN

That's right.

BROTHER COWBOY

What ails you?

MAN

Crack. I'm addicted to crack.

BROTHER COWBOY

Jesus our savior. How long have you been addicted?

MAN

Twenty years. I just have no control.

BROTHER COWBOY

20 years?!

MAN

Nonstop. It's always on my mind.

BROTHER COWBOY

What happens? What happens when you're near crack?

MAN

I... Turn into the devil himself. I can't control it. I'm violent, I do terrible things.

BROTHER COWBOY

So if I had crack here right now?

MAN

I'd take it from you. I'd hurt you if I had too. Then I would use it... Smoke it.

BROTHER COWBOY

Christ have mercy.

(to the audience)

Powerless. He's powerless against Satan and against crack, for twenty years... But God, Jesus! They are the truly powerful! Aren't they?! Jesus can beat any devil, any addiction!

(to him)

Do you believe that?

MAN

I do.

BROTHER COWBOY

Do you believe the power of Christ can end your addiction! Can take the devil away from you forever?! Erase the crack from your mind, erase it from your body and memory?

MAN

Yes!

BROTHER COWBOY

WELCOME JESUS! DO IT NOW! LET HIM CLEAN YOUR BODY AND YOUR MIND! WELCOME HIM INTO YOU AND LET HIM FIGHT THE ADDICTION! DO YOU LET HIM IN?!

MAN

YES!

BROTHER COWBOY
DO YOU?! WITH HEART AND SOUL?!

MAN
I DO, I DO!

He holds his head between his hands. Shakes him violently.

BROTHER COWBOY
ACCEPT HIM!

Brother Cowboy shouts and screams random words incoherently. He shakes the man with all his might.

LUCY
What the...

MATTHEW
Just watch!

He releases the man, who falls on the floor weeping. Beat. Helper exits the stage. The man stops crying.

BROTHER COWBOY
Brother?

MAN
Yes?

BROTHER COWBOY
Are you an addict?

MAN
Me? No, never.

BROTHER COWBOY
Never? You've never... Lets say, smoked crack?

MAN
What, no. Not once.

BROTHER COWBOY
(to the audience)

Are you witnessing this brothers and sisters?

(to the man)

You just told me you were addicted.

MAN

I... Don't remember that.

BROTHER COWBOY

Just now? You don't remember any of it?

MAN

No.

BROTHER COWBOY

You told us you were addicted for years!

MAN

Yes, 20 years.

Beat.

BROTHER COWBOY

But you don't remember it.

Beat.

MAN

No.

BROTHER COWBOY

Okay. And brother. Do you think, if you had a chance you would want crack?

MAN

No...

BROTHER COWBOY

If I had crack for you. Right now. Would you want it?

MAN

I couldn't be near it. It'd make me sick.

BROTHER COWBOY

Would it now? Cause we do have crack here. Bring in the crack!

LUCY

Uh... What is happening?

Helper walks in carrying a little pouch.

Is that crack?

BROTHER COWBOY

Yes.

HELPER

Brother cowboy grabs the pouch, takes out a small rock from it and shows the audience.

There it is folks. The devil himself.

BROTHER COWBOY

I don't want it.

MAN

I thought you did...

BROTHER COWBOY

Approaches him, puts the crack near his face.

No... I'm gonna throw up.

MAN

Smell it.

BROTHER COWBOY

He pushes it onto his nose, Man gasps.
Motions like he is going to throw up. Covers his mouth with his hands and flees the stage.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF JESUS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS!

BROTHER COWBOY

People in the audience go crazy with cheer.
Brother Cowboy takes it in, pumping up the crowd.

I'm sorry, I think need to leave.

LUCY

MATTHEW

You can't leave in the middle of service....

LUCY

This doesn't feel right.

MATTHEW

You promised you wouldn't judge it

LUCY

I can't keep that promise anymore.

MATTHEW

Just... Wait, okay? There's a break soon, then you can leave....

Brother Cowboy approaches the Old Lady.

BROTHER COWBOY

And how are you my sister?

OLD LADY

Not well, not well at all.

LUCY

Oh boy...

BROTHER COWBOY

And why's that?

OLD LADY

I can't shit, pastor.

Audience giggles, Lucy is unsure if this is serious or not.

BROTHER COWBOY

(containing laughter)

That's uh, very colorful language there, sister.

OLD LADY

It's the only way to describe it. The devil is in my belly. For years now. I can't shit.

BROTHER COWBOY

That does sound terrible.

OLD LADY

Sometimes I go through 20 days without shitting.

BROTHER COWBOY

God almighty.

OLD LADY

I know envy is a sin, but I do envy, pastor. I envy people that can just sit on a toilet and shit, cause I just sit there and watch hours go by. The devil won't let me be free.

LUCY

This is has to be some kind of bit. It's a sketch right? Right?

BROTHER COWBOY

(to the audience)

Do you hear that? THE DASTARD DEVIL WON'T LET HER BE FREE!

LUCY

No way.

BROTHER COWBOY

Because the devil is a strategist, see? Not all of his curses and deeds are large. Some are small, precise! Like not letting this poor woman use the bathroom properly for years!

OLD LADY

I can't take it anymore.

BROTHER COWBOY

You don't have to! Cause I won't let it stay this way! Jesus won't allow it! Do you believe that?!

OLD LADY

I do!

Brother Cowboy places his hands on her stomach and starts screaming random incoherent words again. Lucy is horrified. She's had enough and stands up. Matthew tries to stop her, but she starts to leave. Helper notices it, points at her. Brother cowboy stops, released the old lady, who falls on her knees. He sees Lucy.

BROTHER COWBOY

It seems like someone is leaving earlier, brothers and sisters!

LUCY

(stops)

Oh no...

BROTHER COWBOY

What is it? Is the power of God too much for you to witness.

LUCY

No...

BROTHER COWBOY

Speak up! Can't you stand to see the glory of our lord?!

LUCY

I just...

BROTHER COWBOY

SPEAK UP. GET ON THIS STAGE AND SPEAK UP!

LUCY

(going onto the stage)

Just think this is silly! This is all really silly, I don't understand it, it makes me angry!

BROTHER COWBOY

That anger is the Devil's tool!

LUCY

Stop blaming everything on the Devil! He's not making people addicted, and I'm pretty sure that dude had never smoked crack... And I do hope that was not really crack. And if there was a Devil, an actual Devil... Why, oh why the literal hell, would he spend his time, stopping old ladies from using the restroom!

Smoke starts spawning onstage, Lucy doesn't notice it, shouting at the audience. Helper and Brother Cowboy seem weirded out.

Doesn't he have better things to do with his time?! What kind of a ridiculous Devil would that be?!

The smoke has grown darker, taken over centerstage. Brother Cowboy steps away and

signs the cross. Lucy still doesn't notice it.
Not evil, just like, an asshole. Why would that be something that you fear? A devil that you can beat with a laxative?! This is just too silly and, frankly, dumb! And--

Suddenly, from the smoke: All red, with big horns, claws and hooves... A Devil emerges.

The playwright would like to reiterate that this part is no longer verbatim of situations that happened at televangelist shows in Brazil.

A DEVIL

HOW DARE YOU QUESTION MY METHODS, GIRL?!

LUCY

Oh what the fuck.

People in the audience, including Matthew, start fleeing. Helper escapes the stage. Brother

Cowboy tries to approach A Devil, but the beast powerfully pushes him and he goes flying off into the wings.

DEVILS

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?! FOR ME TO GO AROUND CASTING PLAGUES AND ENDING CIVILIZATIONS?! WHERE IS THE FUN IN THAT?! WHERE IS THE CLASS. WHEN YOU LIVE FOR ALL ETERNITY, YOU LEARN TO FIND ENJOYMENT IN THE LITTLE THINGS, LIKE IN... YES, NOT ALLOWING THAT WOMAN TO POOP! IT MAKES ME LAUGH EVERY TIME. The crack stuff is really not me though, I don't mess with that shit. BUT IF MY METHODS AREN'T GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU, MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO SEE SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE APOCALYPTIC , HUH?! YOU SHALL HAVE IT!

Brother cowboy, reappears, beaten but brave.

Holds a crucifix and a bible, moves towards A Devil.

BROTHER COWBOY

The power of Christ compels you!

A Devil grunts and starts backing away.

A DEVIL

YOU THINK THAT'S ENOUGH TO STOP ME?!

Brother cowboy and A Devil are in a stand-off.
Lucy falls on her knees, starts praying.

LUCY

I'm sorry ok?! I didn't know, I didn't understand! I'm so sorry, forgive me! I
repent! Help us God, please help us!

A light comes from the sky onto the stage. "A
Rain in Autumn" by Harvey J Chambers starts
playing from an invisible Organ.

Oh yes, yes please!

A DEVIL

OH NO, IT CANNOT BE!

Lowered onto the stage, in all his glory: A GOD,
The Flying Spaghetti Monster. A Devil covers
his face, backing away in fear. He runs away,
terrified. The Flying Spaghetti Monster pursues
him out. Brother Cowboy and Lucy are alone on
the stage. Silence.

LUCY

Guess we were both right.

BROTHER COWBOY

There is no right or wrong.

LUCY

Yeah?

BROTHER COWBOY

Everyone has a right to believe in whatever they want, sister. As long as it makes
them better. Better people.

LUCY

Huh. I like that.

BROTHER COWBOY

I do too.

(suddenly turning to the empty audience,
in a much more cheerful tone)

That's all we have for today brothers and sisters! But if you liked this amazing
spectacle of God, make sure to subscribe to our new TV service, with glorious
programming like this 24/7 for just 29.99! No contracts, no hassle, just 29.99! Thank
you and have a holy day!

End of Play.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *I wrote this play after going to Times Square Church with a quite religious friends and found myself tracing comparisons between what I was seeing there and had seen before in the Brazilian Evangelical Community. Some of my biggest influences are Carol Churlchil, Martin Mcdonagh, and Harold Pinter.*

AUTHOR BIO: I was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1997 from a family of Lebanese immigrants. I came to the US in 2016 where I Graduated from NYU Tisch with a double major in Drama and Dramatic writing. I've written multiple short plays that were performed at NYSummer and Winterfest, The workshop Theatre, Equity Library Theatre, The National Opera Center, The Secret Theatre, The Players Theatre, and was selected for the 2022 William Inge Theatre Festival. Earlier drafts of my full length Play *Saudades* received a reading sponsored by NYC City Corps in 2021 and was a part of American Stages 21st Century Voices 2022. I'm currently working as a Screenwriter in Brazil with two features in development, including "Wrong Place, Wrong Time"(renowned Brazilian director Pedro Morelli attached to direct); while also pursuing a masters degree in playwriting at Columbia University.