

June 10, 2018
3rd Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 4:20-35
The Rev. Carenda Baker

What a challenging day it's turning out to be for Jesus. He just wants to sit down to a quiet dinner with his friends, but he can't even do that. The crowds are amazed at his power to heal and cast out demonic spirits. They keep following him wherever he goes, can't seem to get enough of him. These needy, sick, marginalized seeking souls are finally getting someone's compassionate attention. No wonder they keep crowding the door, their noses pressed up against the window trying to see what's going on. They are finding hope, healing, new and restored life.

Word is spreading about Jesus, especially about his power to heal and cast out demonic spirits. His family has heard the rumors. It's quite embarrassing for them. People are saying he's gone mad, out of his mind, insane, "beside himself". It could be true. But affixing that label "crazy" to Jesus is a way to discredit him, dismiss his views and actions, a way to try and limit if not destroy his credibility and influence. So they've come to take him back home, away from all this for awhile. The stress can't be good for him, all the people and needs to which he is attending, the pace he is keeping. It's too much. Though it is good work he is doing, his work is doing nothing for their family's reputation. So they're here to do an "intervention", get him to a safe and quiet place, for his own good. His family – his mother, brothers and sisters are not evil or malicious people. They just want things to be stable, comfortable, and peaceful because the world in which they are living is none of those things.

Word of Jesus' healings and exorcisms has reached Jerusalem and gotten the attention of the powers that be. A contingent of scribes has made the trip to assess the impact of Jesus' words and actions, his popularity with the people. This man Jesus is bringing chaos to their long-held beliefs about Sabbath keeping, table hospitality, and religious practices. Someone has spread scandalous innuendo that even the good things, the activities of caring and healing which Jesus is doing, are themselves the work of an evil, rather than a good power. If he is truly a faithful Jew, he would stay far away and go nowhere near those possessed by demons. These works he does cannot be from God. How else could Jesus tap into the power to cast out demons unless he was demon-possessed himself?

But every word Jesus utters, every human being he heals is obviously not for some evil, power-tripping purpose, but precisely to attack the forces of evil that are present in human life.

The scribes are sincere, earnest religious people. And just like Jesus' family members, the scribes are deeply invested in keeping the systems in place as they are right now. Keeping everyday life stable, comfortable, peaceful, and orderly. If peace is not kept among the faithful, how will they ever survive in a land that is repeatedly being overtaken by occupying and oppressive regimes?

What Jesus has been doing is breaking the rules to make sure everyone can experience God's grace. What Jesus IS possessed by is a radically new vision of what it means to live in community and in relationship with God.

There was a commercial sponsored by Apple that aired in 1997 and went viral on YouTube. This commercial was an attempt to re-brand Apple products. The tag line for the commercial and the company was "Think Different".

The commercial showed a collage of photographs and film footage of people who have invented and inspired, created and sacrificed to improve the world, to make a difference. They showed Bob Dylan, Amelia Earhart, Frank Lloyd Wright, Maria Callas, Muhammad Ali, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jim Henson, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Mahatma Gandhi and others. As the images rolled by, a voice said:

"Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels.
The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes.
The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules.
And they have no respect for the status quo.
You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them.
About the only thing you can't do is ignore them.
Because they change things.
They push the human race forward.
While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius.
Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do."

(Quoted from a sermon by Bishop Michael Curry)

As people of faith we are called to "think different". People of faith are called to have different values, because we see this world through God's eyes. Our value system is sometimes going to look out of touch with reality to other people who do not share it. Crazy, in other words.

Jesus' family and the scribes were not interested in seeing the world differently. And so Jesus said plainly, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." These are the ones who make up my family.

To be church, to be that family of Jesus means that when people look at us they can actually identify values and beliefs that make us different. To be church means that we don't go around looking for ways to criticize the world, but that we choose a different starting point -- we decide to be in the world, to serve the world, even view the world grounded in mercy, compassion, and justice -- not fear or condemnation or judgment. The starting point matters.

The Church is not immune to the sins of society. We aren't. What makes the church stand out, and look like it truly is out of its mind, is that we tell the truth of our own sinfulness. We are willing to admit it. Our story, God's story gives us the grounding in divine goodness and grace to admit our failings, and yet still believe that forgiveness is possible. That nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In Bishop Curry's address to the 2012 General Convention of the Episcopal Church in Indianapolis he said:

We need some Christians who are as crazy as the Lord. Crazy enough to love like Jesus, to give like Jesus, to forgive like Jesus, to do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God—like Jesus. Crazy enough to dare to change the world from the nightmare it often is into something close to the dream that God dreams for it. And for those who would follow him, those who would be his disciples, those who would live as and be the people of the Way? It might come as a shock, but they are called to craziness.

So what do you say? Shall we be crazy like our Lord, crazy Christians? May your life and mine reveal the answer.