

MARK 3:20-35

... and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.” ²⁸“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” — ³⁰for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.” ³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” ³³And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Getting Crazy with Jesus

June 10, 2018

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Now here’s a family reunion that Dr. Phil or Maury Povich would love to get on their show. Jesus’ family thinks he has lost his mind and are trying to restrain him, to pull him aside, to basically try an intervention and then he makes his stunning pronouncements about the unforgivable sin and about who his family really is. I’m glad this wasn’t the text for Mother’s Day or Father’s Day for that matter, as that might be a bit of a hard sell. The whole thing is kind of embarrassing.

Though I’m sure if Dr. Phil were to interview the family he might start by reminding them that Jesus has, from the very beginning of Mark’s gospel, been on a whirlwind tour of the country. He has been up and down, east and west, north and south, healing people, feeding them, casting out demons, preaching repentance and forgiveness, challenging scribes and Pharisees, and doing most of it on the Sabbath. He has made beloved followers and dedicated enemies, and this is only chapter 3. Today he has come home to hopefully sit and have a moment to breathe, have a good meal with his family, maybe have some time to talk to mom and get her thoughts on things, but that isn’t what happens. Before he can even say grace over supper, the crowds appear, and he is back center stage. He probably has every right to appear a little crazy right now and it’s no wonder his family is a little concerned.

Of course, we can see their side of it as well. They didn’t ask to have a Messiah for a brother or son. They didn’t exactly sign up for this road show. They aren’t responsible for the choices Jesus makes. But there it is. People are talking about their now famous brother, son, Messiah, and the family is taking some heat for it. Jesus was causing a bit of a stir for his family. He couldn’t go out without drawing attention and he was getting a lot of it, not only from the crowds who wanted to be healed, to be born again, to be exorcised of demons, but also from the scribes and Pharisees who were not, as we would say...Fans.

The pressure was probably making his family a little nervous. Even if you knew your son was the anointed one of God it would probably concern you when you began to hear stories about how he was healing people, casting out demons, challenging the authorities who were in charge of keeping the Jewish people calm, peaceful, and productive, so Rome would keep its eyes somewhere else. These are the rich, the righteous, the powerful, who don’t want things upset. They have a king and it isn’t Jesus. And they have come to challenge Jesus about who he is and how it is that he can cast out demons. They basically accuse him of being filled with the power of Satan and that that is how he is casting out demons.

In a commentary by Brant Copeland, he says, “The leper touching, demon-tossing, scribe-deflating Jesus challenges all our expectations about how God’s Messiah is supposed to behave. In the process he can be an embarrassment, even to those of us who claim to love him. We can wrestle with him, argue with him, struggle to understand him, and even pretend not to know him. The one thing we cannot do is confuse him with Satan. We might recognize ourselves in the confused and embarrassed faces of Jesus’s family, but we might also notice a striking resemblance to those who would limit the Spirit’s freedom to work in unexpected and unorthodox ways.”

God’s love is so much bigger and broader than anyone could imagine, and it scared them a little. And Jesus is challenging us to consider being just as crazy as he is by letting go of things that keep us from loving, caring, and serving those in need. Of course, if we do that we will probably have others think we are “out of our minds” they may think we need restraining or even counseling. They may think we are unorthodox or even sacrilegious. I get that a lot. But my conversation with this text got me to thinking about some other people in the faith that seemed out of control or maybe even a little crazy.

What about Mother Teresa, who people must have thought was a little crazy to sacrifice so much for those who were terminally ill, leprous, forsaken, and without hope. Or Martin Luther King Jr, who faced incredible danger and hatred for walking with, and standing up for, the poor and disenfranchised, seeking racial equality, all in the name of Jesus’s love. Even today the Reverend Jessi Barber II continues the Poor Peoples Campaign, marching and standing in halls of power to make the message of love known. Being arrested, called names, even called crazy. And lastly, Sister Helen Prejean, who wrote, the book *Dead Man Walking* and *The Death of Innocents*, who spends her life walking with those on death row believing that they too are children of God. She isn’t about dismissing their crimes but walking with them and giving them dignity in death. I’ve met her, and her love for others is a powerful thing. But some might call her nuts!

David Lose in his commentary shared these thoughts that are a bit disturbing, but good. He certainly challenges me. He says, “So maybe the question isn’t, “Why is Jesus getting so much flack?” But instead should be, “Why aren’t we getting more?” Why, that is, aren’t we pushing the boundaries of what’s socially and religiously acceptable in order to reach more folks with the always surprising, often upsetting, unimaginably gracious, and ridiculously inclusive love of Jesus? And if that *is* the kind of love we want to offer, we might go on to ask whether we are communicating that message in word and deed loudly and clearly, both inside our doors and outside to the community as well.”

There is a sign that I often see posted in businesses that goes like this, “You don’t have to be crazy to work here, but it helps.” I think that is probably a good sign to hang in the church. That strikes me as being a pretty good mantra for being a Christian in the world, and it reminds me of a story I read this week about a minister named Bill. He also has been accused of being a little bit nuts and I’ll close with this.

“Bill does workshops for churches on clowning. Not long ago, he was in a distant city, packing up after a workshop when the phone rang. Nobody was around so he answered it. “Are you a minister?” somebody asked. “Yes, actually I am.” “Come quickly,” said the voice, “our child is dying of leukemia.”

Bill dropped everything. He ran out to his rental car and drove to the hospital. He parked the car, ran up the steps, through the double doors, and down the hall. Suddenly it hit him: he was still dressed as a clown, with a white face, red nose, orange hair, and green suspenders. He didn’t have time to change. It was an emergency. He kept going. He found the room, knocked on the door, and entered the room where a young girl in a hospital bed lay surrounded by her family. “We called for a minister, not a clown,” said the father. The child replied, “He’s better than a minister. Can he stay?” No one dared to deny her request. Bill sat on the edge of the hospital bed. He sang songs. He told Bible stories. He cradled the little girl in his arms until the end. When the last moment came, she made a final request. “Would you come to my funeral?”

So that's how it happened. On the third day, crazy Bill stood with white face, red nose, orange hair, and green suspenders. He never spoke a word, yet he led the people as they laughed, and cried, and remembered the little girl's life. A few people present thought it was wrong to have a clown at a funeral, much less lead the service. They murmured afterwards, "That minister is out of his mind! He's crazy!"

By all the proper canons of pastoral protocol, they were probably correct. But there he stood, acting as if God's joyful power has already defeated death. Was he crazy? Who can say? All we know is that Bill heard Jesus say, "I am the resurrection and the life," and he acted accordingly.

"You don't have to be crazy to work around here, but it helps." Likewise, you don't have to be out of your mind to do the work of Jesus Christ, even though a faithful life can provoke the world to think of you in just that way.* And I say, "Call me Crazy". Thanks be to God, Amen.

* William G. Carter, *Water Won't Quench the Fire*, CSS Publishing Company