

**Sermon January 22, 2017 – Rev. Nancy Bidlespacher**

We have just heard the text from the gospel of Mark 3:19-21: “Then [Jesus] went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’”

The King James Version of the Bible translates the concern of Jesus’ family for him in these words: “He is beside himself.” The old J. B. Phillips New Testament translates it, “People were saying, ‘He must be mad!’” But my favorite is from the 1995 contemporary English Version, which says, “When Jesus’ family heard what he was doing, they thought he was crazy and went to get him under control.”

Forgive me for saying it this way, but Jesus was, and is, crazy. And those who would follow him, those who would be his disciples, those who would live as and be the people of the Way, are called and summoned and challenged to be just as crazy as Jesus.

I don’t want to be too quick to judge Jesus’ mother and the whole family. They had good reason to be concerned. In 1 Peter there is a teaching that reflect what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9). That’s crazy. In the Gospel reading from Matthew, read just a few moments ago, Jesus says, “The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matthew 23:110). That’s crazy.

What the world calls wretched, Jesus calls blessed. Blessed are the poor and the poor in spirit. Blessed are the merciful, the compassionate. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst that God’s righteous justice might prevail. Blessed are those who work for peace. Blessed are you when you are persecuted just for trying to love and do what is good. Jesus said, “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, pray for those who spitefully use you.” He prayed while folks were killing him, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.” Now, that’s crazy.

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.

Let me suggest one example of such a call from the New Testament: Mary of Magdala, Mary Magdalene. Now consider the crucifixion of Jesus. Crucifixion was execution by the empire for crimes against the state. It was public torture, and intentionally brutal means of capital punishment, an execution designed to send a message that revolution and revolutionaries would not be tolerated. If you were a supporter or follower of the person being crucified, it was dangerous to stand too close by during the execution. The rational thing to do was to go into hiding or exile.

However, if you call the roll of those Jesus called to follow him, Mary Magdalene was present at the crucifixion. When the old slaves sang, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” there was a woman named Mary who could answer, “I was there!” Now, that’s crazy!

Did you know we actually have a day to remember crazy Christians. I think we call it All Saints' Day. It's not called "All the Same Day"; it's All Saints' Day, because, though they were fallible and mortal, and sinners like the rest of us, when push came to shove, the people we honor as saints marched to the beat of a different drummer. In their lifetimes, they made a difference for the kingdom of God.

One example is Harriet Beecher Stowe, born in 1811 into a devout family committed to the gospel of Jesus and to helping transform the world from the nightmare it often is into the dream God intends. She was the author of a fictional work titled "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

The influence of that book was so powerful that Abraham Lincoln is reputed to have said, upon meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe for the first time, "So this is the little lady who started this great war!"

When Steve Jobs, one of the founders of Apple Inc., died, an old Apple commercial from the 90s went viral on YouTube. It was a commercial that aired in 1997 and that attempted to re-brand Apple products. The tag line for the commercial and the company was "Think different," a phrase that is grammatically incorrect – which is part of the point.

In the commercial, they 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. Photographs of Bob Dylan, Amelia Earhart, Frank Lloyd Wright, Maria Callas, Muhammad Ali, Martin Luther King Jr., Jim Henson, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Mahatma Gandhi, and on and on and on. As the images rolled by, a voice read this poem:

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.

We need some crazy Christians. Sane, sanitized Christianity is killing us. That may have worked once upon a time, but it won't carry the gospel anymore. We need some crazy Christians like Mary Magdalene and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Christians crazy enough to believe that God is real and that Jesus lives. Crazy enough to follow the radical way of the gospel. Crazy enough to believe that the love of God is greater than all the powers of evil and death. Crazy enough to believe, as Dr. Martin Luther King often said, that though "the moral arc of the universe is long, it bends toward justice."

We need some Christians crazy enough to believe that children don't have to go to bed hungry; that the world doesn't have to be the way it often seems to be; that there is a way to lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside. Because every human being has been created in the image of God, and we are all equally children of God and meant to be treated as such.

But then we ask ourselves why God would want us and not others who could do such a better job. Maybe we have something in our past which we are not proud of and which we feel may disqualify us from spreading the message. But in order to truly imitate the example of the first disciples, we have to answer our Lord's call without question, without hesitation, without looking back, and without counting the cost. We have to be ready to drop everything that we have known and follow him. What we have to realize is that when God calls us, he doesn't require a job interview. He doesn't hire and fire like most bosses, because He's more like our Dad than our Boss. He doesn't look at financial gain or loss. He's not prejudiced or partial, not judging, grudging, sassy, or brassy, not deaf to our cry, not blind to our need. There are lots of reasons why God shouldn't have called us. But if we are magically in love with Him, if we hunger for Him more than our next breath, He'll use us in spite of who we are, where we've been, or what we look like.

Follow me, said Jesus, and I will teach you how to proclaim by word and example the good news of grace, the good news of the kingdom. Amen.