

Second Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 3:20-35, 2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1, Psalm 138
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“When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’” When we first hear this verse in Mark’s gospel, we might think, “How could anyone say that about Jesus? After all, he is our Lord and Savior. He is divine. He is the second person of the Trinity.”

A couple of years ago a book came out by the bishop of North Carolina, Michael B. Curry. I immediately ordered it from Amazon because I knew of Bishop Curry, and I was fascinated by the title – Crazy Christians. That’s right, Crazy Christians!

Early on in the book he writes, “So, 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 to be exactly that – crazy. If you asked me what the church needs today, I would say this: We need some crazy Christians.”

Now if you think Bishop Michael Curry is crazy, you might be interested to know that he is one of only four candidates to become our next Presiding Bishop or head of The Episcopal Church. Many think he is most likely to be elected at our church’s General Convention, which begins in Salt Lake City later this month.

Bishop Curry would define crazy in part as people who dare to dance to the beat of a different drummer. He cites Christian women like Harriet Beecher Stowe, for example, who shocked the world when her fictional book, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, came out in 1852. In it she showed how the brutality, inhumanity and injustice of slavery actually impacted a slave family. This book in the 19th century did what some YouTube clips do today – It went viral. So much so, in fact, that when President Abraham Lincoln met her for the first time, he is reputed to have said, “So this is the little lady who started the Great War.”

People who in Bishop Curry’s estimation are crazy dare to dream big and not be constrained by conventional wisdom or proper behavior. Of author Stowe, Curry wrote, “There is no doubt about it: Harriet Beecher Stowe was crazy. A woman of her era was supposed to write nice stories, not stories that would disturb the conscience of a nation. A woman of her social standing was supposed to marry well, raise well-bred children, participate in a few charitable activities, and at her funeral be fondly remembered by all who knew her.” He continues, “But Beecher Stowe had been raised in a family that believed that following Jesus meant changing the world from the nightmare it often is into the dream that God intends.”

By the way, Harriet Beecher Stowe is a person we in The Episcopal Church recognize as a saint. (Her saint day in Holy Women, Holy Men is July 1.) It is fair to say that anyone recognized as a saint was considered crazy by many if not most. I wonder if we receive it as a compliment when someone says about us, "You're crazy or out of your mind," when we have a scheme to change the world even just a little.

I do not know who wrote the following poem, but it is appropriate for today. It was used as part of a commercial for Apple computer products.

*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 invent. They imagine. They heal. They explore.
They create. They inspire. They push the human race forward.
Maybe they have to be crazy.
How else can you stare at an empty canvas and see a work of art?
Or sit in silence and hear a song that's never been written?
Or gaze at a red planet and see a laboratory on wheels?
While some 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.*

Thinking, then, about Jesus and our gospel for today, why did some consider him out of his mind as early as Mark's chapter 3? What had he done and said to warrant calling his mother and siblings to come and get him?

He proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand and told people to repent or change their ways.

He started to call simple Galilean fisherman as disciples.

He taught with surprising authority in the synagogues and cast demons out of possessed individuals with a word.

He healed Peter's mother-in-law from a fever as well as countless others from their infirmities.

He touched and healed a despicable, unclean leper.

He forgave the sins of a paralyzed man, after he was lowered through the roof, and healed him.

He invited a hated tax collector to be one of his intimates, and he shared the dinner table with

sinners and other tax collectors.

He told his critics, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

He picked ears of grain to eat and healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath.

And everywhere he went, huge crowds of just plain folks clamored to be in his presence.

As far as his family, critics and admirers saw it, Jesus was either crazed, the devil or a man from God. He conformed to no one, broke some of the rules, performed outrageous and excessive miracles, hung out with the wrong and undesirable people and didn't honor his mother's wishes.

Elsewhere in scripture, he says blessed are the poor, forgive again and again, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, love even your enemies and lose your life to save it. Oh, and he chose to die on a cross. There is only one conclusion – If Jesus is in fact divine, our God must be crazy!

The question we might ask ourselves today is, "What group of people would we be in if Jesus were to have lived in our own day?"

Would we as family have wanted to protect ourselves and him from embarrassment and the scorn of the "respectable, society people?" Do we care mostly what others will think?

Or, would we as the ruling and well-off group have been so threatened by his popularity among the lower classes that we would feel that our way of life was being threatened? The educated scribes in the passage today are a prime example of literally demonizing someone they don't understand or agree with. Do we demonize or bad mouth people or groups we disagree with? Do we further foster evil by finding it easy to see what's wrong but failing to see all the more that is right and good and celebrate it?

Or, do we, as less than perfect and powerful people, welcome and cling to this crazy one who lives and loves with abandon and invites us to be so crazy ourselves as to be considered his mothers and brothers and sisters? Do we regard all conditions of men, women and children, or are we selective?

Personally, I hope Bishop Michael Curry does become our next Presiding Bishop, and then by his example and preaching he can help all us Episcopalians to become crazier Christians for God's sake and the sake of the world. AMEN.

