

Proper 5 B 2018
June 10, 2018 :: Genesis 3:8-15
Fr. Jim Cook

“The Crazy Love of God.”

Let me ask you a question: What does a crazy person look like? I’m asking because I think it’s really interesting that we’re only three chapters into the Gospel of Mark’s story about Jesus, and there are already people going around and saying that Jesus is crazy. More accurately, and quoting from our gospel reading, people were going around and saying that Jesus “has gone out of his mind.”

You know, saying that someone is crazy, that someone is “out of his mind,” is *strong* language. Sometimes it’s true.

One day, not too long ago, I had a young fellow in my office asking for assistance. And during our *attempt* at a conversation, he was almost literally climbing the walls of my office; he couldn’t sit still. And he was hallucinating wildly about his clothing being infested with bugs. At first I thought I was dealing with someone who was delusional, with someone who was crazy. But it didn’t take me long to realize — and mostly because he admitted it — to

realize that this young man was simply high on Methamphetamines.

In that instance, it might have been fairly accurate to call that young man crazy. But, you know, there are other times when calling someone crazy, is simply a way of trying to discredit them in the eyes of others; it's a way of trying to dismiss their views and actions; it's a way of trying to limit, if not actually destroy, their credibility and influence.

And that's precisely what people were doing to Jesus in our gospel reading this morning. And they weren't just calling him crazy now and then, or here and there, or under their breaths. No, they were saying it out loud, and all the time, and wherever Jesus went. And not only that, but even his family seems to be believed the claim, because, as we also heard in our gospel reading, they were moved to try to "restrain him."

So I'll ask the question again: What does a crazy person look like? I mean, what would someone need to do, for you to decide that they were out of their mind? Would they have to embrace *really* different beliefs from you? Or, would it be because they

were at the other end of the political or theological spectrum from you? Or, because they acted and behaved in ways that are hard to understand? Or, maybe even because they have a passion for something that they think — and maybe they even insist — should be everyone’s passion?

Would any of these behaviors make you think that someone was crazy? For me, maybe. I don’t know.

But in Jesus’ case, the reason people were calling him crazy, was because he’d been healing anyone and everyone who needed it. And, he’s been casting out “demons” left and right. But, on some occasions, he was doing these otherwise good things *on the Sabbath*. In other words, he was breaking the rules! He was violating sacred laws.

But here’s the thing: Yes, he’s breaking rules that have been around for hundreds of years, but he was doing so in order that people could experience God’s grace. And when you put it that way, what Jesus was doing actually starts sounding pretty good.

So, why were people going around, and saying that Jesus had lost his mind? Why were they trying to discredit him? Simply put, because he was challenging the *status quo*; and he was challenging age-old religious norms; and he was challenging the authority of the religious leaders who enforced those norms.

And his challenge was mounted on two fronts.

First, he was challenging the norms about who's "in" and who's "out." You see, in those days, people who were thought to be possessed of demons, and people who had disabilities, and people who had chronic illnesses — those sorts of people were often assumed to be cursed by God, or they were simply suffering the consequences of their sins. And therefore, they *had* to be marginalized; they *had* to be excluded from the normal routines of community and faith; and it had to be made clear that they were not welcome in normal society.

And what does Jesus do when he encounters such people? He heals them! And in doing so, he enables them to be restored to their families, and to their communities, and even to their places of worship. And in doing all this, Jesus is implicitly declaring that

there shouldn't be an "us" and "them." That what God desires is unity. And just in case the people who were watching him didn't quite catch the gist of things, Jesus would push this point home by declaring that anyone and everyone who does the will of God are his true brothers and sisters and mothers.

In other words, Jesus was *radically* redefining what constitutes a family, at a time, and in a culture where the family was *everything*.

And so, that's the first way that Jesus was challenging the *status quo*.

And the second way was this: Jesus was putting the needs of the people he encountered *above* the religious traditions and laws which had regulated the lives of those people for hundreds of years.

Now, make no mistake: those religious traditions and laws were important, and they were useful, and they were valuable, but — and this is an important point — they were always intended to be a *means* by which someone could experience of God's grace. To

be a *means* by which we might have an abundant life. Obeying those laws were never meant to be an *end* in and of themselves. (Or, as Jesus said in last week's gospel reading: "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath.")

In other words, whenever we put following-the-rules ahead of meeting human need, we're misusing the very rules which God gave us, to help us *all* flourish. And that's why they called Jesus crazy. That's why they thought he was "out of his mind."

And this is why those who follow Jesus today, are sometimes called crazy as well. Or heretics. Or worse. Because, and to be honest, it does sound kind of crazy, in this day and age, to be a community that invites and welcomes anyone and everyone to join us — *and without even doing a background check*. And it most definitely sounds crazy, in this age of rampant denominationalism, to be a community of people who are happy to declare that God loves each and every one of us — and each and every one of *them* — no matter who, and no matter what.

But you know, the reason that we are such a community, is probably because we've each learned, over time, that whenever we

tried to draw a line between who's in and who's out, well, we've invariably discovered that Jesus was on the other side of the line from us, identifying with those others, caring for them, loving them — and in exactly the same way we've experienced his love for us. So what's the point in even trying to discriminate?

And the reason all this sounds crazy, is because that's not how the world works. It probably never has been. And yet, it seems that whenever we encounter Jesus in the Bible, that's what he's doing. And that's what he calls us to do as well.

Now, make no mistake: Jesus will pay a price for all of this reckless, lavish, loving behavior. Because the people who are calling him crazy, the people who actually like the *status quo*, the people whom his actions threaten, will conspire to get him killed. And Jesus knows that, but he won't let that slow him down. And eventually he will die an unjust death in order to demonstrate God's crazy love for humanity. And on the third day, God will raise him from the dead.

And do you know what? All this may just mean that the Cross had virtually nothing to do with Jesus having to pay the price for

our sins; or with Jesus selflessly accepting the punishment that was due us; or with Jesus' death satisfying God's need for justice.

Instead, what all this may be, is simply an example of just how far some people will go, to extinguish those who witness to God's love. And in that case, the resurrection may well be the testimony that this kind of love can never be stopped — even by extreme violence — and that this kind of love will eventually overcome all.

My friends, we are the followers of a “crazy,” crucified, and loving Messiah. And sometimes it takes a bit of courage proclaim the message of God's universal and unconditional love. But that's what we're called to do, and that's what we're called to be: The “crazy” followers of an even crazier God.

So, I'll ask the question I asked at the beginning: What does a crazy person look like? Maybe, it should look something like us.

Amen.