

How do you define “crazy”? Saying people are “Crazy” or “out of their mind” is strong language. It’s a way of discrediting people, of dismissing their views and actions, of trying to destroy their credibility. It’s the kind of thing that you either say to a good friend (“Don’t be crazy, we could never do that!”) or to someone you really don’t like (“Don’t listen to him – the guy is just plain crazy”).

This is precisely what people are saying about Jesus. And they’re not just saying it once in a while, or under their breaths. No, they’re saying it in the aisles of Hannaford or over a coffee at Zoots. Their saying it even to his family...and his family seems to agree. They are moved to action because “people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind’”.

What does it take for you to decide someone is crazy? Is it that they hold very different beliefs from you? That they are at the other end of the political spectrum than you are? That they act and behave in ways that are threatening or, at the very least, hard to understand? That they have a passion which isn’t just theirs but that they want, even insist, should be everyone’s? What?

In Jesus’ case, it seems to be that he is healing anyone and everyone in need and casting out demons and doing all this *on the Sabbath*, that most holy of days when refrains from any work. Jesus is breaking the rules to make sure everyone can experience God’s grace. You know, that experience of God’s favor that comes to us unearned, undeserved (see BCP p. 858). All of which sounds pretty good. So why are folks saying he’s lost his mind?

Well, think about it: In Jesus’ act of wild abandon and extreme inclusion, to the point of defying religious norms, he is shaking up the people around him, particularly the religious authorities.

First, he’s defying norms about who’s in and who’s out. People possessed by a demon, those maimed or born with some physical limitation or defect – these kinds of people were often assumed to be cursed or to have sinned (or to be suffering from the sins of their parents). It can be easy to fall into this trap. Many years ago I suffered terrific sciatica pain and walking in the middle of the night, even I began to wonder what I had done wrong. Yet Jesus forgives and heals *all* who are in need. Everyone. No exceptions. And, just in case folks weren’t sure about this before, Jesus will soon push his point home when he says that any and all who do the will of God are his true brothers and sisters and mother, radically redefining what constitutes a family in an age when family was everything.

Second, he’s putting the need of the people he encounters above the religious traditions that regulate the lives of the people. Make no mistake: these religious traditions are useful, and valuable, but they are a *means* to an experience of God and greater abundance in life, NOT an end in themselves. And when we put

following the rules ahead of meeting need, we've misused the very rules God gave us to help us flourish. This is why Jesus is called crazy.

And this is why those who follow Jesus today are sometimes called crazy as well. Our Presiding Bishop wrote a book entitled, "Those Crazy Episcopalians". It really does sound kind of crazy these days to invite everyone into our community without background checks, metal detectors, or security. And it may sound crazy to recite those promises at baptism: "respect the dignity of *every* human being...seek and serve *all* persons..." And it's definitely crazy to declare forgiveness for all our sins each week. It's probably even more crazy to say that God loves everyone the same. This is NOT how the quid pro quo world works. And yet it's what Jesus does and calls those who follow him to do as well.

Perhaps the craziest and most disturbing thing about Jesus' actions, is that they rob people (back then and today) of the ability to judge and fence in (or out) and define those around us by how they conform to our expectations. In fact, what we discover over and over again is that anytime we draw a line between who's in and who's out, we discover Jesus on the other side, identifying with them, caring for them, and loving them...just as he loves us.

Jesus will pay a price for this. Those upset by his radical embrace and outlandish love will conspire, threaten, and eventually entrap and crucify him. And none of that will deter him. He will die unjustly in order to demonstrate God's crazy love. And on the third day, God will raise him from the dead. Which may just mean that the cross has next to nothing to do with paying some price, or being punished in our stead, or satisfying God's justice, but rather is the example of *just how far we will go to get rid of those who witness to God's expansive and all-encompassing love*. And the resurrection is ultimately the testimony that this kind of love can simply not be stopped, not even by extreme violence, and it will eventually conquer all.

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