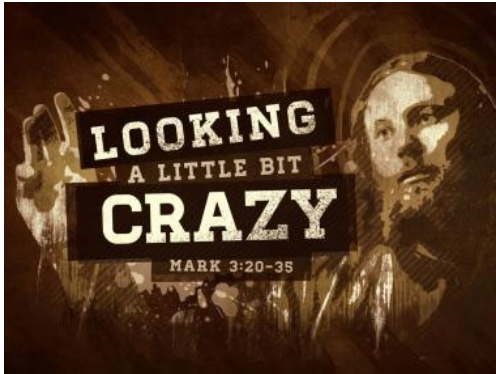


Go Ahead - Call Me Crazy!



I have not found a single person who enjoys being called, “crazy”. Have you? I have been called crazy (jokingly, I hope?) when people found out that I could eat Lucky Charms for every meal. Or the time I played “Vanna White” for my wife’s Young at Heart Wheel of Fortune game at church (You should have seen the people at the Goodwill store as I put dresses up to myself to find just the right one.) But I have also been painfully called “out of my mind” when I shared God’s Word and perfect will to

someone who could only see their discouraging circumstances. Or when I have proclaimed God’s Word that He created us male and female and marriage is one man and one woman. I imagine you have all been in that predicament. It hurts to see them hurting and unaccepting of God’s perfect truth.

God’s Word this week puts before us the truth that there is something strange about the Church. The Church’s view of reality is increasingly out of phase from a lot of prevailing views of the world around us. In the Church, we do and say things that do not always make sense to people “out there” in the world. We gather together on the weekend, sitting on hard pews instead of lawn chairs. People we know are outside, working on their tans or washing their cars, while we gather around Word and Sacrament, inside, to lift our voices in prayer and song. As a lot of other people are planning a barbecue or sipping a refreshing drink, we come together with our church family to partake of Christ’s Body broken for our forgiveness and drink the cup of our Lord’s Blood shed for us. To some outsiders, it must look a little bit crazy. This perception reveals something of what it means to be the Church and why we aren’t worried if we are perceived as just a bit crazy.

St. Mark tells us about the day when the immediate family of Jesus came to take Him away in a straitjacket. The word on the street was that Jesus was “out of His mind.” Taken quite literally, people thought He stood “beside Himself” and was “insane” - out of touch with the reality of the world. They also claimed Jesus was possessed by the devil. That might sound like an odd assessment of His ministry, but it is central to how the Gospel of Mark portrays the work of Jesus. From the beginning, Jesus acted ... well, He WAS different. Jesus announced that God’s reign had come near. He acted and lived as if His view of the world was different, upside down from the world we have taken for granted - and unfortunately, assume to be “normal.”

According to Mark, Jesus did not accept the world as a place of sickness, sin, and evil. He acted and lived as if God had begun doing something new - just as God promised He

would. Jesus not only announced the nearness of God's Kingdom, He acted as if God's reign had actually come and influenced His actions. That's why some people said, "He has gone out of His mind."

The evidence still reinforces that appraisal. We have mistakenly come to accept as truth that it's just part of our existence to tolerate sickness, sin and evil. We listen to the news every morning and night and this evaluation is confirmed for us. So we resign ourselves to the fact that it would be "crazy" to assume any different reality. Jesus came preaching, "The kingdom of God is at hand!" But the evidence reveals God's Kingdom is a disputed sovereignty. Is God really in charge when there's so much bad in the world? That's the issue in the third chapter of Mark.

PLEASE HEAR THIS: If the reign of God has truly intruded upon the status quo (and it has), and such unthinkable things as reconciliation, justification, redemption, atonement, grace, mercy, love have changed our lives, **then we can do the will of God. Now! Exactly where God has placed us!!** Don't lose heart. We rely upon the daily renewal of our God and the renewal we receive through Word and Sacrament. We can confront the powers of hell knowing God rules over heaven and earth. We can act and live in the face of death in the truth that death has already been defeated. We gather in worship, singing praises to a Savior who has already assured us of the world's redemption, our redemption. We are blessed to stand around the baptismal font to claim God's promises for us, our children, and our children's children. Trusting in the final triumph of God, we live and move and have our being in the Lord's redemption even when the world calls us crazy.

Maybe that's what we are: crazy cousins with our odd uncle Jesus. When we live as though God's reign has already come, we find ourselves in a strange new family called "Church." Martin Luther King said, "Let us be as maladjusted and crazy as Jesus of Nazareth, who could look into the eyes of the men and women of His generation and cry out, 'Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Pray for them that spitefully use you.'"

If we believe with all our hearts that Jesus Christ has broken into the violence-prone, death-dealing house of evil, tied up the strong man, that is, the devil, and set us free to live as people of grace and love, **then we must act and live accordingly - as the Church, the family of God.** How did this binding take place? Jesus lived the perfect life we have not lived. In the face of temptation and deceitful lies, this Jesus said "No" to sin and "Yes" to you and me as His family. On the Cross, Jesus died your death as He willingly accepted all of man's sin as His own. He was made to be sin for us. He was treated as the only sinner in all the world and God released all of His judgement for sin upon Jesus. And through the power of the resurrection, Satan, the accuser, the father of

lies, no longer has a basis for accusation. And although he continually seeks to destroy and imprison our souls, he is cast out by one word of truth - Jesus.

Robert Reynolds was taken captive in WWII in the Philippines. He endured the Bataan Death March, months of forced labor, bouts with malaria, survival rations, and 62 days in the sweltering hold of a prisoner transport ship. He suffered cold, deprivation, and even the mocking of children who shouted, "Prisoner!" After his third year of captivity, circumstances began to change. Air raid sirens went silent. Work was canceled. Locals gossiped, "The war is ended." As the leader of the prisoners, Robert entered the prison headquarters to inquire about the status of the war. The commander admitted sheepishly that his country had surrendered. They were no longer in power. Reynolds then said, "Then, we are no longer your prisoners." **Talk about crazy – they were being held captive by a defeated enemy.**

Talk about crazy, right? And yet, we are all guilty of living as though we are prisoners to this world. We fall into apathy thinking that the tide of bigotry, injustice, racism, sexual equality and sexual sin - that this wave has eroded any truth we could proclaim. As our Synod's evangelism tool teaches - we can listen first, ask so we can listen some more - and then seek, share, invite and encourage. But so often we judge, then isolate and blend into the world. We don't want to cause any trouble (while allowing the people who need to hear God's truth walk away). Crazy, right? Especially when our hearts overflow with the truth that we have been set free. We have the cure for sin right on our lips. We have the cure for racism in the lens of our eyes as God allows us to see that all lives matter - from the moment of conception to the grave. We have the cure for sin in our hands that we have clasped rather than sharing the open hand of God's unfailing and unconditional love.

In Genesis 3:15, God immediately responds to sin with His grace - the promise of salvation from His work, not ours. The unforgivable sin is against the Holy Spirit - unbelief. But we are called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified by the same Spirit to do battle with all that oppose God and His will. But this battle isn't against the world but against sin and unbelief. **It's a battle for all people.** That's why we need to be "crazy" for the Lord. We are battling for every soul. As we hear in 2 Corinthians (in Sunday's Epistle), the things of this world (and the things most of the world clings to) are transient but the things of God are eternal. Our hearts get tugged by scenes of suffering in the world and yet our hearts are calloused to those dying every second without believing in Jesus. Before your feet hit the ground in the morning, trace the sign of the Cross on your forehead and heart in remembrance of your Baptism, and ask God in prayer where and how you can be "crazy" for Him.

I read a story about Pastor Bill. He had been accused of being a little bit nuts. Bill does workshops for churches on clowning (his clown ministry). Not long ago, he was in a distant city, packing up after a clown ministry workshop. The phone rang. Nobody was around. He answered. "Are you a minister?" somebody asked. "Yes, actually I am." "Come quickly to the hospital," 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 crazy 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 pastor, not a clown," said the father. The child replied, "He's better than a pastor. 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 whispering to trust in Jesus as His child - until the end. When the last moment came, she made a final request, "Would you come to my funeral?"

On the day of her funeral, crazy Pastor Bill stood with white face, red nose, orange hair, and green suspenders. He spoke the truth of Christ's perfect life, atoning death and victorious resurrection. He spoke of the joys of heaven and the defeat of sin, death, grave and the power of the devil. A few people present thought it was wrong to have a clown at a funeral, much less lead the worship 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 proclaiming God's joyful power of defeated death. He spoke of the redeemed life of a little girl now in heaven. Was he crazy? Sure! But crazy like Jesus opposing the opinion of the world that you can get by without the One, True, Triune God.

Likewise, you don't have to be out of your mind to do the work of sharing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, even though a faithful life can provoke the world to think of you that way. Yes, the world will call you "crazy" if you share God's Word and Will. But isn't it more crazy to live as those **still** imprisoned by sin and death than to live as those who are free? By the grace and saving love of God, we are empowered and equipped to live according to His will and act and live as His family. That may seem a little crazy to the world who believes the lies of Satan, that we are still bound by the evil of this world and **powerless to do anything to change it.**

But nothing could be further from the truth. We belong. We're forgiven. We have the promise of heaven. Death no longer has any power over us. And the role of the Church? Change the world, **one freed prisoner at a time.** Sharing the joy of God's redeeming grace just like Jesus. That's the will of God and that's what we're uniquely equipped to

do as God's family. **If that's what it means to be crazy - then go right ahead, call me crazy. How about YOU?**

Don't ever lose heart in this crazy world - for we are being renewed day by day as God's family. **Let's go with crazy!** Jesus proclaims to you personally and through you as His witnesses - very sanely and clearly - that what the world needs to witness is the binding of the one who has put them in bondage. Our witness allows them to see clearly the undoing of the old, evil foe. The stronger One has come and what is frightening is not what Jesus is doing, but if Jesus did nothing! And so Jesus is not out of His mind - He is, in fact, the only One in His right mind. Should you be bold enough to share the Gospel, listen closely. You may hear Christ say, "You're My brother you're My sister you're My family."

So, have you ever been called, "crazy" for following the will of God? For your Christian t-shirt? For your poster that bespeaks God's truth? We need the encouragement of one another so we can be "crazy" together as God's Church bearing witness for Christ in our daily lives. Please be encouraged to share your stories of being called "crazy" for Christ. Send your stories to this email: EvangelizationTeam@englishdistrict.org We look forward to hearing from you. Even if you just want to say, "It's not crazy eating Lucky Charms for all three meals"!

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20