

Mark 3:20-35

... And the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.”

23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

28 “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— 30 for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

3:31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.”

33 And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

## A DIFFERENT WORLD

During the Cold War, I heard a speech by a college professor who had formerly lived in the Soviet Union. He compared our country with the Soviet state. He said that we should not underestimate the differences.

Often what’s considered crazy in one country is readily accepted as normal in the other.

He said this is why we had such a hard time negotiating and communicating with the Soviets. Our perspectives were so different it was like we came from two different worlds.

Christians understand that problem. Followers of Jesus have values and perspectives that are often quite different from the rest of the world.

In fact the more we try to follow Jesus the more we will find ourselves being misunderstood and coming into conflict with the powers that be.

And some will even think that we are crazy.

CHRIST?

In Mark Jesus does not claim to be the Christ, the Messiah. But, his works of power and authority speak for themselves. Many follow him in hopes that he will prove to be the long awaited Savior.

In our lesson for today we read that when Jesus went home the crowds grew so great that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat. (Mark 3:19b-20) The power and popularity of Jesus made him a man to be reckoned with.

People had to decide. Was he the Christ or was he crazy? Was he the Savior, the Son of God or some deluded egomaniac who was leading the people astray? With Jesus there is no middle ground. The same is true today.

He was either Christ or crazy.

Down through the ages some have tried to universalize the message of Jesus. They say something like, "Oh yes Jesus was the Son of God, just as we are all sons and daughters of God when we do the right thing."

That argument would not have worked with those who first experienced the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was either the Son of God or he somebody who was very dangerous and deceptive. He was the way, the truth and the life or he was the devil incarnate.

You see Jesus didn't teach like the religious leaders of his day. Jesus didn't preach a nice intellectual brand of religion. He taught, the Bible tells us, as

one who had authority. His presence brought about a confrontation with the powers of evil. His teachings were often at odds with traditional beliefs and teachings.

## CRAZY?

Mark lumps two unlikely groups together in this passage, the religious leaders and Jesus' own family.

Now we could understand the religious leaders calling Jesus crazy. After all Jesus did heal on the Sabbath and when the religious leaders objected Jesus said in strong language that the ritual law was pretty much bogus.

More than that Jesus was attracting large, adoring crowds. No doubt the religious leaders viewed this with suspicion and jealousy. They also thought that this might be dangerous. The Roman government would not tolerate any pretenders to the throne, and a Messiah like figure attracting large crowds would also attract the attention of the powers that be.

But, why did Jesus' family think that he was crazy? Shouldn't they have taken pride in his ability to heal and teach?

But, that wasn't their reaction. In our lesson for today we read, "...they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'"

Now some translators of this passage seem to have trouble with the harsh reaction on the part of Jesus' family. So they try to soften it with a polite euphemism. They thought that Jesus was "beside himself." But, that is not an accurate translation. They thought Jesus was "out of his mind." In other words the family thought Jesus had gone off the deep end. They thought he was crazy. Jesus was not in charge of himself any more so the family came to take charge of Jesus. They were coming to take him away for his own good.

## WHY CRAZY?

This is one of those passages where we need Paul Harvey to get the rest of the story. Why did they call Jesus crazy? Surely, there is more to this story than is contained in Mark's account.

We can only speculate, but I do think we have some pretty good clues based upon Scripture.

For example, later on in Mark's gospel Jesus will visit his home in Nazareth again. But, he is violently rejected. The people said,

“Who does this guy think he is? We know who he is. He's a carpenter. We know his mom and his family. Who does he think he is claiming to have this kind of knowledge and the ability to do miracles?”

Perhaps Jesus' family thought the same thing. They might have said to him, “Jesus, don't be silly. You're not a prophet. You're a carpenter. Come on home where you belong.”

But, more than just doubt that a son, a hometown boy could be a prophet lay behind their rejection. I suspect they were also troubled by his message.

In Mark's gospel we have already read about the temptation by Jesus in the wilderness. For forty days Jesus stayed in the desert without any food or water. There he was tempted by the devil.

I wonder if Jesus told them the story of what happened in the wilderness. I wonder if Jesus told them about how the devil tempted him and the wild animals threatened him. I wonder if he told them about how the angels delivered him. To some this story might not have sounded crazy.

And then there was the matter of the disciples that Jesus picked. No sane person would pick a group like this, among them a common fisherman, a tax collector, and a political revolutionary. Really? These guys were going to help him bring in the new kingdom?

And then there was the fact that Jesus had this disturbing tendency to associate with the “low life” of the world, eating with tax collectors and sinners of every type. What kind of kingdom is built by cultivating the people that don't matter?

There were other reasons that the family might have thought that Jesus was crazy. Some said that he actually touched a leper. Surely only a crazy man would do something like that. He had the unsettling habit of telling people

their sins were forgiven. Only God could forgive sins. Was Jesus claiming to be God? That sounded a lot like blasphemy.

So, when the family heard that Jesus and his disciples weren't even eating because the demands of the crowd were so great they knew it was time to do something. In modern terms they attempted to hold an intervention.

They rushed to take charge of their son and tell those who were about to harm him, "Please don't mind what our son, Jesus does. He's not in his right mind."

### THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

But, the religious leaders took it one step further. Jesus was more than crazy. He was in league with the devil. And they thought this dispute with the family presented the perfect opportunity to squelch this nutty pretender once and for all. The Scribes said,

"Jesus is possessed by the devil. By the prince of the demons he is driving out demons."

And Jesus said,

"Now that really is crazy. Can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."

To put it another way, Jesus said, "Your charges don't make sense. Why would Satan drive out those spirits who are doing his will?"

The religious leaders of Jesus' day (much like many religious leaders in our own day) had a very narrow view of God's will. And when anyone stepped outside the lines that they had drawn, they were quick to call that person a heretic or crazy or in league with the devil.

When it comes to religion we want everyone to think the same way and act the same way. We want everyone to fit into the same mold. But, what if our mold is not God's mold?

There's a story about a man named Hans who was a tailor. Because of his reputation, an influential businessman visiting the city ordered a custom made suit from Hans.

But, when he came to pick up the suit, the businessman learned that one sleeve twisted one way and another sleeve twisted in the opposite direction. One shoulder bulged out and the other shoulder caved in. He pulled and struggled and finally, wrenched and contorted, he managed to make his body fit the suit.

As he returned on the bus, another passenger noticed his odd appearance and asked if Hans the tailor had made his suit. Receiving an affirmative reply, the man remarked,

“Amazing. I knew that Hans was a good tailor, but I had no idea he could make a suit fit someone as deformed as you!”

This is what the religious leaders of Jesus' day had done. They said,

“This is what true religion should look like.” And then they pushed and shoved people until they fit into the religious straitjacket that they had created.

But, Jesus came to free people from the religious straitjacket. Jesus said things like,

“The Sabbath is God's gift to the people. It is not an opportunity to create a maze of life choking rules and regulations.” The religious leaders were not amused.

But, the worst thing was the fact that Jesus talked about a God who could well nigh forgive everything. Once before he healed a paralyzed man Jesus looked at him and said, “Your sins are forgiven.” That really shocked the religious leaders because they knew that only God could forgive sins. And then in our lesson for today (Mark 3:28) we hear Jesus say, “I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men and women will be forgiven them.”

Wow. That's hard for us to believe. Is that really true Jesus? Can all sins really be forgiven? Can adultery be forgiven? Yes. Can lying be forgiven? Yes. Can even murder be forgiven? Yes.

## BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

All sins can be forgiven if people repent. But, there is one exception. There is one sin that cannot be forgiven and that is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

What is that? What is this sin that cannot be forgiven? It is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And what does that mean?

Well, the Holy Spirit works to bring people back to God. The Bible tells us that the Spirit is the Spirit of reconciliation.

But, suppose we deny that we are sinners? Suppose we think that our way is the right way and that we have no need to repent?

Then we have rejected Jesus and his message. We are cut off from the Spirit of forgiveness. We take God's freeing Word of grace and turn it into a straitjacket of rules and regulations.

That's what the religious leaders did long ago. And that's what we often do even today. We attempt to rate sin and sinners, but the Bible tells us that all have sinned and all fall short of God's glory.

There's no need to rate sin and sinners. We're all in the same boat.

We too are sinners without hope save for the grace of God as revealed in Jesus. To the world God's mercy seems crazy. But, for those of us who have been forgiven and freed by the power of God's mercy, it is our salvation.

## JONAH'S STORY

Do you remember the story of Jonah from the Old Testament? God called Jonah to preach against the city of Nineveh because it was so wicked. It took a whale of a lot of persuasion to get Jonah to do it.

But, finally he did.

Jonah preached God's word of judgment to Nineveh. But, much to Jonah's chagrin the people of Nineveh repented and God relented in his judgment.

And Jonah was angry with God.

We can be the same way. We complain bitterly about those people who "get away with murder." We want our enemies to be destroyed.

But, God doesn't fight evil that way. God overcomes evil with good.

From the world's perspective God is crazy just like his Son was crazy. God is crazy in that no price is too high when it comes to saving the people God loves. God takes pity on us.

And God even sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

And so we are called to bring that "crazy" message of forgiveness into an unforgiving world. And when we do that, when we bring that message into the world, lives are changed. Our world expands. And so does our family.

## PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

About three hundred and fifty years ago a shipload of travelers landed on the northeast coast of America. The first year they established a town. The next year they established a government. The third year the city fathers wanted to build a road five miles westward into the wilderness.

In the fourth year the people wanted to impeach their town government because they thought it was a waste of public funds to build such a road.

Who would ever need to go five miles into the wilderness? It was crazy.

These people had traveled three thousand miles across an ocean and overcome great hardships to get to the new world. But, in just a few years they were not able to think about pushing the boundaries any farther.

They had lost their pioneering vision.

Today there are those that want to narrow our vision. There are those who want us to focus only on those that are closest to us. But, the faith we have in Jesus cannot be limited to just our kith and kin. Jesus' salvation is for the whole world.

That's why Jesus fought so hard against the unforgiving and legalistic message of the religious leaders of his day.

Jesus was a pioneer, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith the Bible tells us. Jesus came to push the boundaries of who could be saved and who could be a part of God's family.

In today's lesson Jesus said, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." In other words, everyone who does God's will as revealed by Jesus is in the family.

Of course this flew in the face of what devout people in that day believed. They thought that God's family consisted only of those who were children of Abraham. Genealogy defined family for them. But, Jesus had a different measure of family, a measure that pushed the boundaries of faith in a radical way.

## HABITAT FOR INSANITY

Most of you are familiar with the organization called Habitat for Humanity. Millard Fuller, the founder of that organization tells of building one of their homes and coming to the work site one day to find the sign in front of the building defaced with graffiti.

Instead of reading Habitat for Humanity the sign now read, "Habitat for Insanity."

Millard was upset by this, but the more he thought about it the more he thought that the new sign was true.

It was insane to think someone could actually make a dent in the problem of substandard housing. It was insane to think that people from all denominations and cultures could come together to do God's will.

But, they called our Lord crazy, and we know that he is the Son of God, the salvation of the world.

Maybe we too need to be a bit crazy to follow Jesus. Maybe we too need to be a bit crazy to believe that people from all over the world can come together to serve a common Lord.

But, the Bible tells us that what seems like foolishness to the world is really the wisdom of God.

Welcome to God's family. The world calls us crazy. But, God calls us his children.

Amen.