

“Out of Our Minds”

Sermon: Year B, Pentecost 2, Proper 5, Lectionary 10

Text: Mark 3:20–35, 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1

Preached: June 10, 2018 at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Evanston, Illinois

Grace and peace to you from Jesus, the wild and crazy one. AMEN

Do you have crazy relatives? Are *you* the crazy relative in your family? I come from the South, where we specialize in crazy relatives, but having lived most of my life in the North now, I can assure you of this: Y’all have them too. Now, I could regale you with some of my stories, which could be a lot of fun, and could get some laughs, but as I prepared for the sermon today, I remembered that my family reads my sermons quite faithfully on the website, and frequently they are passed along to my mother to read, so in the interest of retaining my status as a beloved son, and my status in the will, I’m going to restrain myself from sharing any of my stories from the pulpit today. And I’m certain there are many stories that could be told about me, and that may well be being told at this very moment. I will admit to my own quirks...usually. Sometimes I am the crazy relative, myself. But we all know the crazy relative, the one who does things that are just, well... different. Now, it’s important that I point out that I’m not using “crazy” here in the sense of mentally ill, especially in light of the heightened awareness of depression and suicide. Mental illness is a subject that we should not make light of, especially given the stigma we so often attach to those who suffer from it. Here I’m talking about that kind of eccentricity that makes people talk about you while clucking their tongues...or as we say in the South, “Bless her heart.” And sometimes whole families are seen as crazy... “Mmm, mmm, mmm, those Frys, you know. Bless their hearts.”

Did you ever think of Jesus as the crazy relative? Because that is how this passage describes him. This is a quirky reading, I will admit, and raises all kinds of troubling questions. I can remember lying awake at night as a teenager wondering if I had somehow committed that “unforgivable sin” of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It’s like trying not to think of a pink elephant. Once you start wondering if you’ve done it, then the thought starts messing with your mind. But if you read the story carefully, Jesus is not addressing that remark to us in general. He’s very specifically addressing it to the scribes who have come down to check on him and who are accusing him of doing the works of the devil, rather than doing the works of God. They are saying that the amazing things Jesus is doing by the power of the Holy Spirit are actually being done by the power of evil spirits...that Jesus is demon-possessed, not Spirit-possessed, so the blasphemy is that these religious leaders are calling the works of God works of the devil, instead. So, sleep easy, dear people...your salvation is secure.

But let’s back up a bit and put this whole passage in context. This is happening very early in the gospel of Mark. Jesus has just gotten started here. He’s been making a huge splash, healing people, casting out evil spirits, telling people that their sins are forgiven—a power that only God has, in the religious thinking of his surroundings—and saying that the Kingdom of God has started breaking in on this world. It’s crazy stuff he’s doing and talking, in the eyes of the good religious folks. And this crazy talk is drawing crowds: crowds of sick and wounded people, crowds of mentally ill people, crowds of hungry people, crowds of lowlifes and ordinary folks dragging along their crazy relatives, ignoring the warnings of the good religious folks because they have heard that this Jesus guy is doing crazy, wonderful things, and they want to see for themselves, they want this crazy power for their own lives. Jesus is saying and doing things that are making some people nervous, though, because his words and deeds are changing things, and they are definitely *not* the way things have been done before. The good religious folks, the scribes, are nervous enough about what’s happening that they’ve come up from Jerusalem to check Jesus out, and they do not like what they are seeing and hearing one bit. What Jesus is saying and doing is threatening the status quo, and it’s getting people excited and stirred up, and who knows what could happen? So the religious folks decide that it must be wrong, it must in fact be satanic, because it is not what they are used to, and it is changing things.

The craziness is to the point that the crowds just won’t leave Jesus alone. It’s to the point that he and the disciples can’t even grab a bite to eat, because people are so desperate to find healing, so desperate to hear that God’s Kingdom is for them, too, so desperate to find forgiveness for the things they’ve done wrong, so desperate to know that God loves them like a parent who delights in them, so desperate to hear about a God who is concerned for their lives and their healing, who is concerned for justice and peace, not a God who demands the fulfillment of every single, tiny human interpretation of God’s commandments, a God who loves them and who is not seeking to condemn and destroy them.

So Jesus goes where he thinks he can find some peace...he goes home. And what does he find there? Not only the religious folks accusing him of being possessed by Beelzebub himself, but also his own family, who have heard that Jesus has been talking this crazy talk and doing these crazy things. Some of the neighbors have been saying to the family, "Your son is nuts. He's out of control. You need to go get him." The family is troubled enough by Jesus' actions that they literally come to get him to restrain him. Have you ever thought of Mary standing there with a straightjacket, ready for Jesus' brothers and sisters to wrestle him down? And that's how passionate Jesus was, that his family is worried that he might need to be restrained. And maybe they're embarrassed, too, feeling the sting of stigma, wondering, "What will the neighbors think??" That's how crazy Jesus' message sounded...that's how threatening it was to the way things were.

Have we lost that radical sense that what Jesus says and does sounds crazy to the world? And that in fact it *should* sound crazy, that it *should* shock and shake things up? All too often, I'm afraid, we have become the scribes, sisters and brothers...we have become the ones who hold Jesus at arm's length and want to wrestle him down and restrain the power of the Spirit because it's just too crazy for us. We want everything to stay just the same. We don't want anything to change in our religious practice, in our worship, in our world, in our personal lives. We want to stay in the house, away from the crowds, eating in peace and quiet, not having anything change or move around us. We want to keep God's Kingdom in a nice little box, not rocking the boat, not making any waves, keeping our mouths shut, not having anyone even have the temptation to call us crazy. See, I think that all too often *we* are the ones who think Jesus is crazy. All too often, we are the brothers and sisters who want to put a straightjacket on him.

But folks, we're called to be Jesus' *other* brothers and sisters. We're called to be crazy right along with him. We're called to be out there in the world saying and doing the things that will get us called crazy, too. Remember, as we talked about on Pentecost, a crowd gathered and began jeering the first believers, calling them crazy and drunk because they were so filled with enthusiasm. That's the kind of crazy I'm talking about. Like our brother crazy Jesus, we're called to bring radical healing to those who are in need of healing of body, mind, or spirit. Like crazy Jesus, we're called to feed those who are hungry. Like crazy Jesus, we're called to pronounce forgiveness to people who crave it, not to condemn them because they aren't perfect. Like crazy Jesus, we're called to shout and shake the foundations of power, when that power is used to oppress and destroy. Like crazy Jesus, we're called to "bind the strong man," to work against the powers of evil that are so strong in our world and that work against the inbreaking of God's Kingdom. Like crazy Jesus, we're called to shake up even the settled religious practice—yes, even our own religious practice—even when it makes us uncomfortable, even when it's "the way our family has always done it." Like crazy Jesus, we look not at things that can be seen, but things that are not seen, and we see a new heaven and a new earth just below the surface, budding forth.

Jesus calls us to upside-down craziness. Jesus wants us to draw crowds with our boldness and crazy words and deeds. And that means we can't settle down. It means that we come to this meal together to grab our sustenance, but like the disciples in this story, we eat our meal in haste, because God has crazy, liberating ideas that will draw us out of our comfort zone and that require our action...and that action is not inside the house all cozy together, but out there with the crowds, out there in the world.

We are not called to be the conventional, settled family of Jesus, tied to the way things have always been, afraid of change, afraid to speak and do crazy, bold things in the world. Jesus said that the ones who do God's will are the ones who are his own sisters and brothers, are his mother. We are family! We bear his resemblance. Brothers and sisters, look around you, look behind you. Beloved, *we are called to be the crazy relatives*, the ones people point at and say, "Look at what they're doing and saying!" What are the crazy things Jesus wants us to do here in this congregation, here in Evanston, in our world? What are the crazy things we should be trying? What are the bold things we should be announcing? What are the crazy, Kingdom of God-type things Jesus is calling us to do as Jesus' family here? "Mmm, mmm, mmm, those Jesus people, you know. Bless their hearts." AMEN