

**Grace Episcopal Church, Galena IL**  
**June 7, 2015 Proper 5B**  
**Sermon by Rev. Gloria Hopewell, D.Min**  
**Text: Mark 3: 20-35**

We do not know from the story I just read, whether Jesus' family thought that he had lost his mind, or whether they have come to rescue him from others who believe that he has. Translations differ. Our NRSV says, "When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'" The Common English Version, "When Jesus' family heard what he was doing, they thought he was crazy and went to get him under control." And Eugene Peterson's paraphrase *The Message*, "His friends heard what was going on and went to rescue him, by force if necessary. They suspected he was getting carried away with himself."

Whatever they thought, they were concerned, wanting to get him away—out of the public eye—for his own protection, or, perhaps, to preserve the family name. In times when the extended family was the basic unit of society, that kind of attention could be risky. And, already, the religious authorities were gathering and asking questions.

In just this third chapter of Mark's Gospel, here is what had happened so far. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, went off into the wilderness where he resisted Satan's temptations, began his ministry with healings and exorcisms. Just prior to this story, he had called the last of his twelve disciples, even adding a despised tax collector to his fishermen and farmers. He was already attracting such crowds that there was no time to eat.

These throngs of the marginalized and oppressed in need of healing would probably not have excited anyone. Itinerant preachers and healers with followings were not uncommon in those times. But this one appeared to be a problem for the religious authorities. Jesus was said to be blatantly violating the Law—by hanging out and eating with sinners, by forgiving sins, and even by healing on the Sabbath right in the synagogue. So, they tried to silence him by accusing him of being in league with Satan and performing magic. Jesus, of course, countered. They were committing the unforgiveable sin--confusing the Holy Spirit with Satan.

The family made another attempt to get his attention. But when Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were calling for him, he made that famous statement, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

That could be just like a knife through a mother's heart! Or evidence that he *had* gone crazy. How might any one of us act if a child—even a grown child—or a grandchild blew us off like that when we came to help? But we know that's not really what's going on, don't we? In this short comment, Jesus is stating his purpose, setting forth what is most essential and what defines the nature of those who would follow him—doing God's will.

Jesus wasn't really disrespecting the family. But he was redefining it, opening it up beyond blood relationship, sameness, and a long history together. His family wanted to take him home, get him out of the spotlight. If he really was crazy, there would be shame to the family. They were at cross purposes.

Well, that was then. And this is now. Right? The world has changed. It really would be crazy to walk away from our families. Or, at least, irresponsible. Wouldn't it? Our families and our family loyalties should come first. Shouldn't they?

Families today sometimes circle the wagons like that. Maybe to protect one of their own. Maybe to take care of themselves first. Our churches, that we often call "families," sometimes do the same. Taking care of our own needs first. But we must be careful. Is it a family that seeks and follows God together? Or is it a family that just likes each other's company? Oh, to be sure, that is important—particularly in today's world, people are looking for a sense of belonging. The danger is that we become focused too much on our own group and do not reach out to embrace everyone who is seeking God. Or to care for those in need.

Mark's gospel doesn't tell us how we are to follow God's will—how we are to discern where God is calling us. Just that we are to follow. To stick around and hang out with Jesus.

The Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, and one of the four candidates from whom our new Presiding Bishop will be elected at General Convention later this month preached on this text at the last General Convention. He had some ideas about this:

"forgive me for saying it this way, but Jesus was, and is, crazy. And those who would follow him, those who would be his disciples, those who would live as and be the people of the Way are called and summoned and challenged to be just as crazy as Jesus.

We need some Christians who are as crazy as the Lord. Crazy enough to love like Jesus, to give like Jesus, to forgive like Jesus, to do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God -- like Jesus. Crazy enough to dare to change the world from the nightmare it often is into something close to the dream that God dreams for it. And for those who would follow him, those who would be his disciples, those who would live as and be the people of the Way? It might come as a shock, but they are called to craziness.

We need some crazy Christians. Sane, sanitized Christianity is killing us. That may have worked once upon a time, but it won't carry the gospel anymore. We need some Christians crazy enough to believe that God is real and that Jesus lives. Crazy enough to follow the radical way of the gospel. Crazy enough to believe that the love of God is greater than all the powers of evil and death. Crazy enough to believe, as Dr. King often said, that though "the moral arc of the universe is long, ... it bends toward justice."

We need some Christians crazy enough to believe that children don't have to go to bed hungry; that the world doesn't have to be the way it often seems to be; that there is a way to lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside; that, as the slaves used to sing, "there's plenty good room in my Father's kingdom," because every human being has been created in the image of God, and we are all equally children of God and meant to be treated as such."

Amen.