

1 Samuel 8:4-20
Psalm 138
2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1
Mark 3:20-35

Feast of St Barnabas, Transferred
St. Barnabas Bainbridge Island
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Crazy

Well, if you're wondering where the good news is in today's gospel, you're not alone. Although the religious authorities ended up conspiring with the political authorities to destroy Jesus in last Sunday's gospel, that was only the beginning. We've begun a long walk through Mark's gospel, and in Mark's gospel, sometimes I have to really work to eek out the good news. So, here we go. This passage falls on the heels of Jesus having called the rest of his disciples. Despite his admonitions to keep quiet about the miracles he was making, huge crowds of people were seeking him out and following him around. He was healing everyone in sight, and sometimes even on the sabbath. Some of the people who were following him around weren't there for the miracles. Some of the people were there to make the miracles stop. The people who wanted to destroy Jesus last Sunday, have now been joined by folks who don't necessarily want to kill him, but who have determined that he is absolutely crazy. What they actually said was "He has gone out of his mind," but it's all the same. Even his family was saying it...

You're crazy.

Has anyone ever said that to you? I don't mean in a joking way, but in a real way, a way that tells you, you have no credibility, or anything of value to offer. Has anyone ever said that to you a way that discredits and dismisses you, a way that ends the conversation and leaves you with nothing?

You're crazy.

I've been on the receiving end of that statement, because the person I was talking with didn't like what I was saying, didn't want to believe what I was saying and wouldn't consider the possibility that what I was saying had any truth in it.

He's crazy.

That's what the crowds were saying about Jesus. They didn't like what he was saying or doing because it threatened their social and religious constructs, and that is a lot of threatening! First of all, Jesus, with his outlandish, boundless and inclusive love, was not making the appropriate distinctions between insiders and outsiders. In the first century Mediterranean world, in-groups and out-groups were a societal construct, and no one moved in circles of people who weren't their people (which is a little window into why Jesus needed to talk about division). And when you add to that the ancient belief that people who had physical ailments, serious illnesses, or mental health issues were considered unclean and untouchable, that they were being punished

for the sins of their parents or some notorious sin of their own, it's hard to believe Jesus was even speaking to those outsiders, let alone healing and restoring them to wholeness.

Jesus, living and teaching the outrageous truth that every single human is precious in God's sight and beloved of God, shattered the lens they'd been looking through and turned the social system upside down. It's why they said he was crazy. They had to. They had to discredit him, to pretend what he was saying couldn't possibly be true, or the rules that held their lives, their families, their whole world together, would crumble.

Jesus also put people and relationships first. If someone, anyone in his presence was suffering, he healed and restored them, regardless of who they were or what day of the week it was. When the religious rules and people's need for healing seemed to conflict, Jesus met the needs of the people because he knew God's gift of the Law was actually intended to do good and to give life, to care for God's people. We saw that last week when Jesus healed a man on the sabbath. Jesus was always concerned with the spirit of the Law rather than the letter of the Law, and because of that, the big guns, the scribes and the Pharisees from Jerusalem, had come to watch him too. And having watched him, they accused him of using satanic powers to fuel his miracles. It's hard to say whether or not they really believed he was full of the devil, but that was about as bold and discrediting a criticism imaginable. You'd have to be crazy to think you could do good work using satanic powers.

Have you ever told someone they're crazy and meant it? Have you ever thought it? I'm guessing most of us have. What makes us decide that? Is somebody crazy because they don't share our beliefs? Are they crazy because they don't share our politics? Or because they believe something so strongly, they insist we think the way they do? People don't have to be wrong because they are not like us. Calling people crazy and making them wrong only serves to divide us, to separate us from each other, and that can never be good. If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. Even an individual divided against herself, cannot stand.

The way Jesus lived and loved meant that there could be no division. St Paul talked about that by saying there was no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. Jesus talked about it in many ways, but today he did it in a most surprising way. When his family came looking for him because people were saying he was crazy, were you surprised at his response? "Hey Jesus, your mother and brothers and sisters are outside waiting for you!" "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he answered. That seems rude. But of course Jesus wasn't being rude. He was turning things upside down again, but he wasn't being rude.

When Jesus asked the question, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" and then went on to say that the people who do God's will were his family, he wasn't being rude to his mom or disowning his kin. He was radically redefining "family" in a time when family was the foundation for society. Remember, the people Jesus was surrounded by were living under Roman occupation, and in the Roman world, everything belonged to the father, the paterfamilias, for as long as he lived. I don't just mean the land and the money and the stuff of their lives. The

father essentially owned all the people in his extended family too, because he had not just legal authority over them, but also the power of life and death. And because that was so, without family, you had, and were, nothing. So for Jesus to redefine family to mean those who share values and belief, was to destroy the foundation of the occupier's world. No wonder they called him crazy.

It's ironic that the family & social system Jesus overturned with his radical redefinition of family is based on the father, when there is no mention of a father in this whole exchange. There are only mother, brothers and sisters. While Joseph never comes up in Mark's gospel, I don't think that's the point. I think the point is, that in this reconstitution of the family, there is no hierarchy, no household ruler, no owner of people or things.¹ God is the head of this family, and God alone. There is no division, there is only radical inclusion.

When I visited the Holy Land, I sat with two fathers who had suffered the most unspeakable tragedy imaginable. They had both lost young daughters. The Israeli father, Rami, lost his 14-year-old daughter in a Palestinian suicide bombing. The Palestinian father, Bassam, lost his 10-year-old daughter when she was shot in the back of the head by an Israeli Border Policeman. Through what could only have been God's grace, Rami and Bassam were introduced to each other by Yitzhak Frankenthal, founder of the Parent's Circle, a group of Israelis and Palestinians who have lost loved ones in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Rami and Bassam had suffered the same horrific tragedy and both of them chose reconciliation over revenge. "Once in a while, you meet people which are your soul mates, which are your twins," Rami says. "We went to their house to eat and they came to our house to eat, and you don't see such relationship between Israeli and Palestinian families."

These families suffer together, grieve together, eat together and continue to work for peace together. "... Rami remembered asking Bassam, 'What are we going to do now? How do we cope with such atrocity, with such horror? He said, 'We go on. We have no other choice.'" "You can use pain to bring darkness and destruction," Rami says, or "you can use pain to bring light and hope."²

¹ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Mark", *Women's Bible Commentary*, p. 482

² https://www.huffpost.com/entry/operation-change_n_555591?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAJPhC2bcRPMzrcB34c5RGLYhxUV11Wu5qXR2Ra4wucd7kCUY7Y5j7Simi41Y3ev1ErwZggkCbSiqVJFG6GWwfOVzr4NCZHI7LeGMX8LoZK2x3bt0USOZOHWYmrDZgm3AwSflqOVqzV_GBeqCwY03PF0LbTASztYZGv5Xpzc_cLI accessed 10/12/19

I don't know that I will ever have a stronger, more poignant experience of setting divisions aside. Bassam and Rami spoke honestly of the places they are different, and they didn't evade the reality of the centuries-long conflict between their countries and their cultures. But that isn't what they see when they look at each other. When they look at each other they see themselves – brave and vulnerable fathers who have lost their precious daughters because of political and religious conflict they both know in their hearts can be overcome. They have done it, and they believe they can help other people do it too. They believe it so strongly, in fact, they have given their lives to it. Do people think they're crazy? I'm sure they do. But this is what the crazy, upside-down Kingdom of God looks like.

And it's the world I want to live in, the world I want to help create. I know we live in a world of deep religious divides, deep political divides, even deep personal divides. And yet, this radically inclusive love that casts out all judgment and breaks down all division, overcomes that division, one kindness at a time, one open mind at a time, one helping hand at a time, one loving heart at a time. Jesus knew that. He gave his life for it. And as his followers, we're called to do the same. And while God's good work won't likely cost us our lives, there is a cost to the Christian Life, to this kind of loving.

People just might think you're crazy. Amen.