

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Second Sunday after Pentecost – June 7, 2015
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Mark 3:20-35

FOR REFLECTION

“The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God’s foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man’s insanity is heaven’s sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic; and weal or woe, feels then uncompromised, indifferent as his God.”

Moby-Dick by Herman Melville (93.13)

<http://www.shmoop.com/moby-dick/madness-quotes-2.htmlxx>

Crazy

If you want to discredit someone – call them “crazy.”

If someone is casting demons out of “crazy” people – then they are probably “crazy” too by association. Touching lepers and hanging out with people of questionable reputation doesn’t help.

Anyone who takes a political stand against the status quo – and causes a large number of people to gather together in agreement and occupy public space as if they had a right to it – must be “crazy.”

Most “crazy” people have family – who want to live a normal life under the radar – and are genuinely concerned about their child and brother who is making scenes, saying inflammatory things and drawing dangerous attention to himself and the family. That family will sometimes stage an intervention to bring them back into alignment.

And in a time and culture where family connections are paramount – rejection of family – even on theological grounds – could be seen as “crazy” – it’s just not right.

There were “people” who were saying that Jesus had “gone out of his mind.” There were people who were out to “get” him, discredit him, get that crowd to stop following him.

And then there’s the possibility that those “people” who were saying these things were right – Jesus really was mentally ill – by medical standards of our own day.

He could have inherited the gene from his mother – a young woman who heard and spoke to angels – and swore that G-d was the father of her child. He too was on a mission from G-d – heard voices and had mystical experiences – claimed a singular sense of importance in the world – spoke in riddles – lived on the streets with few possessions and depended on the kindness of strangers and friends.

Crazy people are often charismatic and passionate – drawing a cult following and creating an alternative reality that supports their idiosyncracies.

And sometimes these crazy people are dangerous to themselves and others. It has happened in Waco and Washington, Hillsboro and Los Angeles, Berlin and Uganda – why not Galilee?

However, not all crazy people are clinically mentally ill.

And not all mentally ill people are off base in their sense of the world, politics, religion and ethics.

”Crazy” ends up being a label we put on people and ideas that don’t fit our world view, that threaten our way of life, that cause us anxiety or discomfort.

It’s a way of separating ourselves from them – and creating OUR own reality where OUR idiosyncracies are the norm.

My previous husband, Carl, was brilliant – funny – idiosyncratic – creative – impossible. I spent 20 years with him – living inside of a world that allowed me to just “be” rather than don personas like costumes. His awareness and experience of classism was keen and his political views gave me new lenses to see the world. We had some of the best conversations of my life. He also self-medicated for a condition that was ultimately diagnosed as “bipolar with schizoid affective disorder.” And by the time we understood what was going on, enormous emotional damage had been done and I had to extricate myself from the marriage in order to save myself.

Carl was my qualifier for Al Anon and my teacher in life. Our relationship was one of the most difficult things I’ve ever been through – and the main reason I am as healthy as I am now – having gotten the help I needed to survive. He was absolutely crazy. (But then so was I.) And much of that craziness made him interesting to me.

I’ve always been drawn to “crazy” people. Three of my closest friends in high school turned out to be mentally ill – but I’ll tell you – life with them was a trip. The last church I served in the South Bay served breakfast to 60-80 homeless folks every Sunday morning. Because this is post-Reagan California, a good portion of those people were mentally ill with no place to go for care. Another bunch were vets – made poor and “crazy” by combat, PTSD and our lack of economic and other infrastructure support as

a nation. And there were others who had lost families and homes because of alcoholism or joblessness or spousal battering or just bad luck.

Breakfast on Sunday morning at one table could be quiet and filled with the need for personal space. Another table could be animated with conversations about conspiracy theories and political realities. And once in a while there would be personality clashes or acting out that meant the police would need to come and correct some behaviors. I bonded deeply with a woman who was my age with a very similar background – only she was short and Jewish and I was tall and Christian. She was kind of “crazy” – mostly from being homeless. But much of our “craziness” overlapped – we shared familiar personality quirks and ways of interpreting life. Our difference in circumstances had very much to do with a few of the choices we had made – what kind of human resources we had to fall back on – and the luck of the draw.

So what does this have to do with Jesus? He’s another one of my crazy friends, for sure. He probably would have loved the South Bay Sunday Breakfast Bunch and Burning Man and this congregation. His idiosyncracies would have fit right in here. But then – there are A LOT of different kinds of Christians who would say the same thing – because we love to project our own world views onto his historical and much interpreted persona.

Jesus wasn’t rich – but a lot of rich people believe their wealth is a gift from him. Jesus did not conform to the religious and cultural norms of his day – but a lot of conformists today would justify their position by their relationship with him. Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunk, a drifter and a criminal, a scoff-law and “out of his mind.” But most Christians today would be horrified by my saying that – and call me “crazy.”

But I believe that Herman Melville got it right: “So man’s insanity is heaven’s sense...” G-d has always used “crazy” people to try to make the world right. Moses was born poor, adopted by royalty, killed someone, went on the lam – then came back and liberated Egypt’s Hebrew workforce. He had a speech impediment and saw burning bushes out in the middle of nowhere – but he is known to us as a courageous liberator.

Crazy people have stood up to power, gained the right to vote, been arrested to change bad laws, sat at lunch counters while others poured food on them and spit on them, lived with gorillas, made gender transitions, designed internets, made movies about climate change and bad health care and the inside of autism and people who succeeded against all odds. Crazy people have invented things, discovered things, changed the world forever. Crazy people are making sense as the world has gone nuts.

So maybe – just maybe – instead of putting all of us crazies on medication – we should put all of us crazies in charge of fixing what’s wrong. Instead of trying to warehouse homeless people and old people and “differently-abled” people to put them out of sight – we might interview them to discover what they know and put them in charge of things that highlight their strengths and passions – and might help the world.

Instead of relegating out-of-work actors and writers to service jobs – let’s put them all in the same movie – pay them to create something new and wild and outside the box. Let’s establish an ongoing “gift economy” – call it socialism or burning man or Jesus movement – and actually live by pooling resources and skills – and see how that changes the world. Let’s create a haven where people can be who they are and drop pretense at the door and relax into their idiosyncracies in peace.

Let’s get crazy – Jesus crazy – and see where it takes us.

‘cause this sanity thing just isn’t working out well.

And maybe it’s time to let G-d determine some new norms – that may seem crazy now – but will turn out to be exactly what we needed.

Scripture Reading for Sunday June 7, 2015 – Pentecost 2

Mark 3:20-35

20 Then he went home 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."

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."

