

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

June 6, 2021 (Lect. 10, Proper 5, Year B)
Mark 3:30-35

Let's begin with a story, a true story. Bill is a minister. He also has been accused of being a little bit nuts. Bill used to do workshops for churches on clowning. Believe it or not, people use to like clowns. You know, before Steven King RUINED it.

Anyway, one afternoon, he was in a distant city, packing up after a workshop. The phone rang. Nobody was around, so HE answered. "Are you a minister?" somebody asked. "Yes, actually I AM." "Come quickly," said the voice, "our child is dying of leukemia." Bill dropped everything. He ran out to his rental car and drove to the hospital. He parked the car, ran up the steps, through the double doors, and down the hall.

Suddenly it hit him: he was STILL dressed as a clown, with a white face, red nose, orange hair, and green suspenders. He didn't have TIME to change. It was an emergency. He kept going. He found the room, knocked on the door, and entered the room where a young girl in a hospital bed lay surrounded by her family. "We called for a minister, not a clown," said the father. The child replied weakly, "He's BETTER than a minister. Can he STAY?" No one dared to deny her request. Bill sat on the edge of the hospital bed. He sang songs. He told Bible stories. He cradled the little girl in his arms until the end. When the last moment came, she made a final request. "Would you come to my funeral?"

So that's how it happened. On the third day, crazy Bill stood with white face, red nose, orange hair, and green suspenders. He never spoke a word, yet he led the people as they laughed, and cried, and remembered the little girl's life. A few people thought it was wrong to HAVE a clown at a funeral, much less lead the service. They murmured afterwards, "That minister is out of his mind! He's crazy!"

By all the proper canons of pastoral protocol, they were probably correct. But there he stood, ACTING as IF God's joyful power has already defeated death. Was he crazy? Who can say? All we know is that Bill heard Jesus say, "I am the resurrection and the life," and he acted accordingly.

You don't have to be out of your mind to do the work of Jesus Christ, but following his WAYS might make the world THINK of you that way.

Now, let's be honest, it's unpleasant, isn't it? It's uncomfortable.

Anyone here LIKE being criticized?

How do you RESPOND to criticism? Does it bring you down or fire you up?

Do you want to hunker in your bunker or lob your own volley of vitriol back at your critics?

I heard a hospice CHAPLAIN talk about a call HE received to a deathbed. He went and sat with the person and prayed with her – until her SON got there. He walked in and said, "What the HELL are you doing here? GET OUT!"

The chaplain said he was tempted to leave in a huff, like "Fine, if you don't WANT a chaplain." But he didn't. He knew the son just needed some time, and sure enough, half an hour later, they called him back to the room.

Learning how to RESPOND to criticism is a LIFETIME journey – critics will FOLLOW you all the way to the grave.

Maybe we shouldn't be so SHOCKED when we hear that someone criticized JESUS. In our Gospel we read, "People were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'"

But it's not just ANY people; it's his OWN FAMILY. Apparently, all Jesus' talk about INVISIBLE kingdoms of God and casting out demons led his FAMILY to the conclusion that Jesus was SEEING things that no one else could see. And the reason was simple: he MUST be OUT of his EVER-LOVING mind! Lunie, out of his tree, off his rocker, out of his gourd, a sandwich SHORT of a picnic, out to lunch, a few fries short of a happy meal, out in left field, INSANE.

I'm reminded of an old song from the sixties called "They're coming to take me away." Do you remember it? The chorus went like this:

They're coming to take me away, haha,
They're coming to take me away,
Ho ho, hee hee, ha ha,
To the funny farm
Where life is beautiful all the time
And I'll be happy to see
Those nice young men
In their clean white coats
And they're coming to take me AWAY,
HA HAAAA

Jesus' own family thought he was stark-raving mad.

And no sooner after they ACCUSE him of it, the RELIGIOUS leaders chime in with their OWN verdict. And of course, they up the stakes. In the opinion of the scribes, Jesus HIMSELF was a DEVIL. If Jesus seemed to have inside information as to the goings-on in the demonic realm, the explanation was simple and obvious -- "it takes one to know one." They accuse Jesus of being a DEMON.

It was a RIDICULOUS thing to say, and FOOLISH, too. Why would the devil be shooting himself in the foot? What kind of military commander blows up his own tanks? No, if Jesus seems to be plundering the REALM of the devil, it's because he had already bound and gagged the devil HIMSELF, and so now his minions were easy targets for Jesus. He did his work not because he had the power OF the devil, but because he had ALREADY DEMONSTRATED power OVER the devil.

The accusation is SO PATHETIC, so laughable, there must be something ELSE going on here, something REALLY UPSETTING people.

I mean, we're into just the THIRD chapter in Mark and ALREADY he's got the crowds WONDERING about him, his family AFRAID for him (and maybe OF him!), and the religious leaders plotting AGAINST him. And all he's done so far is announce the coming kingdom of God, call some disciples, cast out a demon or two, and HEAL a bunch of SICK people.

It makes you wonder, "WHY is Jesus getting so much FLACK?"

Oh yeah, ONE of those disciples he called ... was a tax collector.

And that DEMON he cast out ... was on the Sabbath.

And the HEALING he did ... was with UNCLEAN people like LEPERS.

Which means that, in a world of SHARP distinctions, and divisions, and hierarchies and EXCLUSIVITY, JESUS' vision of the KINGDOM of God was rooted in a PROFOUND INCLUSIVITY. There was NO ONE who was BEYOND his grace, and he wouldn't let any religious law or social custom PREVENT him from REACHING those in need.

This is MORE than just the hospitality of being PATIENT with NEW folks UNTIL they learn the RIGHT way, the way WE do things. Jesus is about meeting people where THEY are, accepting ANY AND ALL who are interested in God's kingdom, and responding to need no matter WHO is asking, or WHEN or HOW they ask.

He's Crazy. Wacko. Cuckoo. Bonkers. Nuts. Loco. Out of his mind.

And that makes people MAD. When we see someone who doesn't CONFORM to our predetermined social or religiously agreed upon EXPECTATIONS, we call them rebels, or radicals, or unnatural, or immoral. Or CRAZY.

And it STILL happens to everyone who FOLLOWS Jesus. Because the LOVE of God we see REVEALED IN Jesus KNOWS no boundaries and RESPECTS no laws that would KEEP that love from being shared with EVERYONE.

(Watch video "Unexpected fans.")

One of the boys said, “We ALL need someone who BELIEVES in us, who KNOWS our mistakes and LOVES us ANYWAY.” Amen to that.

I imagine some kids from that school and their families said, “No way! I’m not going to cheer for THEIR team, the PRISON team! That’s nuts. It’s CRAZY!”

But did you see how it TOUCHED those players? They’ll REMEMBER that for the REST of their lives.

So it may have BEEN crazy, and the story never said if those two boys who organized it were even CHRISTIAN, but that day, Jesus SMILED and said, “THIS is what my FAMILY LOOKS like. THESE are my brothers and sisters. These are YOUR brothers and sisters.”

So call me crazy. Call me a CLOWN. But we follow the WAY of JESUS, and JESUS chooses LOVE. Amen.