

Mark 3:20-35
June 10, '18

“GOING AFTER JESUS”

SERMON PREPARATION CAN QUITE OFTEN TAKE ONE ON AN ADVENTUROUS JOURNEY INTO PLACES THAT HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WHATSOEVER TO DO WITH THE TOPIC OF THE SERMON.

THIS WEEK, FOR EXAMPLE, I LEARNED THAT THE TERM “POLITICALLY CORRECT” HAS BEEN DEEMED “POLITICALLY INCORRECT” BY THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN AT MILWAUKEE.

I DISCOVERED THAT BECAUSE I WAS CONSIDERING USING THIS MESSAGE AS PART TWO OF AN UNINTENTIONAL 2-PART SERMON SERIES.

LAST WEEK’S SERMON “*WHAT ANGERS YOU?*” WOULD HAVE BEEN PART ONE AND THIS WEEK’S PASSAGE FROM MARK LENDS ITSELF TO A LOGICAL FOLLOW-UP – “*WHAT MAKES YOU CRAZY?*”

I WAS A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE USING THAT WORD “CRAZY,” SO I GOOGLED THIS QUESTION – “*IS THE WORD CRAZY POLITICALLY INCORRECT?*”

OF THE 9,790,000 RESULTS, THE FIRST ONE THAT POPPED UP WAS AN ARTICLE BY THE LATE ESTEEMED NATIONALLY SYNDICATED COLUMNIST OF THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE, MIKE ROYKO.

I OPENED IT & WAS ASTONISHED WHEN I READ THE FIRST LINE FROM SOMETHING ROYKO WROTE IN 1994.

HE BEGINS HIS COLUMN – ONE THAT WOULD APPEAR IN NEWSPAPERS ALL OVER THE WORLD – WITH THESE WORDS: “*I HAVE TO BEGIN BY SAYING THAT THIS STORY IS KIND OF CRAZY. IT CONCERNS A MAN WHO OWNS A WATERBED & BEDROOM FURNITURE STORE IN.... EVANSVILLE, INDIANA!*”

OF COURSE, WE ALL KNOW THAT STORE AS “CRAZY LARRY’S.”

THE GIST OF THE ARTICLE CONCERNS A LETTER OF COMPLAINT THE OWNER RECEIVED ABOUT HIS USE OF THE WORD “CRAZY” IN HIS STORE’S NAME & SUGGESTING IT’S HURTFUL, OFFENSIVE & INSENSITIVE TO THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM MENTAL ILLNESS.

ROYKO GOES ON TO POINT OUT THAT THE LETTER OF COMPLAINT WAS SENT, NOT JUST TO *CRAZY LARRY’S*, BUT ALSO TO A PARTICULAR EVANSVILLE RESTAURANT AT THE TIME.

SOME OF YOU MAY HAVE GUESSED THAT RESTAURANT WAS “*THE CRAZY TOMATO*” ON GREEN RIVER ROAD, NEXT TO GOODWILL.

IN HIS COLUMN, ROYKO BECOMES A BIT CYNICAL ABOUT THE COMPLAINT & THE CONCERN OVER LANGUAGE.

I THINK WE’D ALL ADMIT TO BEING A BIT EXASPERATED & CONFUSED OVER WHAT’S ACCEPTABLE SPEECH & WHAT ISN’T.

I SUPPOSE MY INCLINATION, THOUGH, IS TO TRY TO AVOID USING LANGUAGE THAT SOMEONE WOULD DEEM AS HURTFUL, WHETHER I UNDERSTAND THEIR REASONING OR NOT.

EVEN THOUGH I DON’T INTEND SOMETHING TO BE OFFENSIVE ISN’T THE POINT.

WHETHER OR NOT I THINK SOMEONE SHOULD BE HURT BY MY LANGUAGE IS COMPLETELY IRRELEVANT.

IF SOMEONE *IS* OFFENDED – IF SOMEONE *IS* HURT – I THINK I WOULD DO WELL TO AVOID SUCH TERMINOLOGY.

SO THAT WAS THE JOURNEY I TOOK THIS WEEK IN SERMON PREPARATION, BUT IN THIS CASE, IT *WASN’T* ONE OF THOSE PLACES THAT HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WHATSOEVER TO DO WITH THE ACTUAL SERMON TOPIC.

THOUGH IT MAY NOT BELONG IN THE TITLE OF THE SERMON, YOU CAN'T AVOID "CRAZY" WHEN YOU READ THE WORDS WE'VE READ TODAY.

THIS IS A FASCINATING PASSAGE IN MARK'S GOSPEL.

AT ITS MOST BASIC LEVEL, WHAT WE FIND HERE IS PEOPLE "GOING AFTER JESUS" – AND GOING AFTER HIM IN TWO DIFFERENT WAYS.

WE'VE SAID BEFORE THAT MARK MOVES US AT BREAKNECK SPEED THROUGHOUT HIS ENTIRE GOSPEL.

ONE THING LEADS QUICKLY TO ANOTHER & YOU SOMETIMES HAVE TO STOP & TAKE A BREATH, JUST IN READING IT.

IN THE VERSES WE'VE READ TODAY, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF ISSUES THAT MIGHT MAKE YOU WANT TO STOP & SAY, "*WHOA! LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS!*"

IT'S HERE THAT JESUS MAKES REFERENCE TO WHAT WE COMMONLY REFER TO AS "THE UNPARDONABLE SIN."

AND YOU LOGICALLY ASK - "*WHAT'S THAT ALL ABOUT? I THOUGHT GOD WOULD FORGIVE US FOR ANYTHING WE DID? AM I, PERHAPS, GUILTY OF COMMITTING THE UNPARDONABLE SIN – SOMETHING FOR WHICH I WILL NEVER BE FORGIVEN & WILL THEREFORE SPEND ETERNITY AWAY FROM GOD?*"

I DON'T WANT US TO DWELL ON THAT, BUT HERE'S AS SIMPLE AN ANSWER AS I'VE EVER HEARD, AND IT'S BASED ON THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE ITSELF.

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN IS – "*A SPECIFIC, ACTIVE, AND FINAL CHOICE TO DECLARE THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS AS BEING DEMONIC IN ORIGIN.*"

WHEN THOUGHT OF IN THAT WAY, IT SHOULD PRETTY WELL EASE YOUR MIND AS TO WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE COMMITTED “THE UNPARDONABLE SIN.”

THE ANSWER – I THINK IT’S SAFE TO SAY – IS “*NO, YOU HAVEN’T,*” BECAUSE I DOUBT THAT ANYONE HERE TODAY HAS MADE “*A SPECIFIC, ACTIVE, AND FINAL CHOICE TO DECLARE THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS AS BEING DEMONIC IN ORIGIN.*”

IT IS ALSO IN THESE VERSES THAT WE HEAR WORDS THAT CONJURE UP THOUGHTS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

WE HEAR JESUS SAY, “*IF A HOUSE IS DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF, THAT HOUSE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO STAND.*”

PRESIDENT LINCOLN MADE REFERENCE TO THIS VERSE WHEN HE ASKED THE QUESTION OF HOW A NATION COULD STAY TOGETHER IF IT WAS HALF SLAVE & HALF FREE.

BUT PERHAPS THE MOST TROUBLING PART OF THIS PASSAGE IS FOUND IN THE FINAL VERSES.

JESUS SEEMS TO OFFER A WORD OF REJECTION TO HIS FAMILY – HIS OWN MOTHER ALONG WITH HIS BROTHERS & SISTERS.

IF YOU LOOK AT JUST THE FINAL FIVE VERSES, IT SEEMS RATHER HARSH ON THE PART OF JESUS.

HERE’S WHAT HAPPENS –

HIS FAMILY GETS WORD THAT JESUS IS IN TOWN & THEY GO TO SEE HIM.

IT’S SO CROWDED IN THE HOUSE, THEY HAVE TO RESORT TO SENDING HIM A MESSAGE THAT THEY’RE WAITING FOR HIM OUTSIDE.

SOMEONE PASSES THE WORD TO JESUS – “*HEY, YOUR MOM’S HERE – AND SO ARE YOUR BROTHERS & SISTERS!*”

AND WHAT DOES *JESUS* DO?

DOES HE JUMP UP AND SAY “*HANG ON, FOLKS! MY FAMILY’S HERE TO SEE ME*” AND THEN RUN OUTSIDE TO BE EMBRACED IN THEIR WELCOMING ARMS?

NO. HE REMAINS RIGHT WHERE HE IS, LOOKS AROUND AT THOSE WHO HAVE COME TO LISTEN TO HIM PREACH & TEACH, AND SAYS, “*MY MOTHER? MY BROTHERS & SISTERS? MY FAMILY? YOU ARE MY FAMILY.*”

TAKEN BY ITSELF, YOU HAVE TO ADMIT – THAT’S HARSH!

BUT GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING OF THE PASSAGE.

IT’S THERE THAT WE DISCOVER THE REASON JESUS HAD THIS KIND OF REACTION TO A VISIT FROM HIS FAMILY.

IT’S THERE THAT WE FIND ONE WAY THAT PEOPLE WERE “*GOING AFTER JESUS.*”

FIRST OF ALL, THOUGH, WE HAVE TO GO BACK TO LAST WEEK’S PASSAGE IN MARK.

IT ENDED WITH THESE WORDS: “*THE PHARISEES WENT OUT AND IMMEDIATELY CONSPIRED WITH THE HERODIANS, HOW TO DESTROY HIM.*”

AND THEN TODAY’S PASSAGE *BEGINS* BY TELLING US - “*PEOPLE (GUESS WHO THAT WAS) WERE SAYING ‘HE HAS GONE OUT OF HIS MIND & IS POSSESSED BY DEMONS.*”

I’D SAY THE PHARISEES & HERODIANS CAME UP WITH A PRETTY GOOD PLAN FOR HOW TO DESTROY HIM, DIDN’T THEY?

THE WAY THEY WERE “GOING AFTER JESUS” WAS BY TELLING OTHERS THAT HE WAS OUT OF HIS MIND – AND, EVEN WORSE, POSSESSED BY DEMONS!

THIS IS HOW THE PHARISEES & HERODIANS CONSPIRED TO DESTROY HIM.

AND WHAT DOES THE FAMILY OF JESUS DO ABOUT IT?

MARK TELLS US “THEY WENT OUT TO RESTRAIN HIM.”

JUST LIKE THE PHARISEES & THE HERODIANS, THEY WERE “GOING AFTER JESUS” AS WELL.

THE WORD THAT IS USED FOR RESTRAIN IS THE EXACT SAME WORD MARK USES WHEN HE TELLS US OF THE ARREST OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE ARREST OF JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

IN LIGHT OF THAT, IS IT REALLY ANY WONDER THAT JESUS SEEMS TO HAVE A HARSH REACTION TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A VISIT FROM HIS FAMILY?

THEY THOUGHT HE WAS OUT OF HIS MIND.

AND THIS TAKES US BACK TO THE VERY BEGINNING – THEY THOUGHT HE WAS “CRAZY.”

SO LET’S GIVE IN & TALK ABOUT THAT WORD.

JESUS WAS CRAZY.

FROM THE VERY OUTSET OF HIS MINISTRY, HE WAS CRITICIZED & CONDEMNED ON ALL SIDES.

THE THINGS THAT HE WAS DOING DIDN’T FIT IN WITH WHAT WAS PERCEIVED TO BE ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR.

ANYONE WHO WOULD ACT AS HE WAS ACTING HAD TO BE OUT OF HIS MIND.

HE HAD TO BE CRAZY TO DO THE THINGS HE DID & SAY THE THINGS HE SAID.

NOBODY IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD GO OUT OF HIS WAY TO STAND ON THE SIDE OF THOSE WHO WERE OPPRESSED, IGNORED & REJECTED BY PROPER SOCIETY.

NO ONE BUT A CRAZY MAN WOULD SAY THINGS LIKE “*TURN THE OTHER CHEEK, GIVE YOUR CLOAK AS WELL AS YOUR SHIRT, FORGIVE SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN, BLESSED ARE THE POOR, THE HUNGRY & THE THIRSTY.*”

GIVEN ALL THAT JESUS SAID & DID, WE SHOULDN'T BE AT ALL SURPRISED THAT HE WAS CONSIDERED CRAZY & OUT OF HIS MIND.

INSTEAD, I THINK OUR SURPRISE & ALSO OUR CONCERN SHOULD BE MORE ABOUT *OURSELVES*.

IF WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST, WHY AREN'T PEOPLE LOOKING AT *US* AS CRAZY & OUT OF OUR MINDS?

BECAUSE, YOU SEE, TODAY'S STANDARDS AREN'T REALLY MUCH DIFFERENT.

IN THIS DAY & AGE – MUCH THE SAME AS THE DAY & AGE OF JESUS - THE WORLD STILL LIKES TO PUSH PEOPLE ASIDE IF THEY DON'T MEET A CERTAIN CRITERIA OF WHAT'S ACCEPTABLE – BEING THE RIGHT RACE, HAVING THE RIGHT ETHNIC BACKGROUND, ADHERING TO THE RIGHT RELIGION OR SPEAKING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE.

YOU – LIKE JESUS – ARE OUT OF YOUR MIND IF YOU WANT TO STAND UP IN DEFENSE OF “THOSE” PEOPLE.

YOU – LIKE JESUS - ARE CRAZY IF YOU THINK THEY DESERVE ACCEPTANCE, LOVE, COMPASSION, PROTECTION & CARE.

SO I ASK AGAIN – WHY AREN'T PEOPLE LOOKING AT *US* AS CRAZY & OUT OF OUR MINDS?

BECAUSE HERE'S THE THING – THE WAY OF CHRIST DOESN'T CHANGE.

IT NEVER HAS & IT NEVER WILL.

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS THE SAME TODAY AS IT WAS FIVE YEARS AGO OR FIFTY YEARS AGO OR FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

THE WAY OF CHRIST IS JUST AS CRAZY TODAY AS IT'S ALWAYS BEEN.

AND IT TAKES SOMEONE WHO'S OUT OF THEIR MIND TO BE WILLING TO STAND UP FOR THE WAY OF JESUS.

THAT'S THE OTHER WAY OF *“GOING AFTER JESUS.”*

THE CROWDS THAT HAD GATHERED AROUND HIM – THE ONES HE LABELLED AS HIS “FAMILY” - WERE THOSE WHO GOT IT.

THEY KNEW HE WAS LOOKING AT THE WORLD IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

THEY WERE “GOING AFTER JESUS” BECAUSE THEY'D SEEN SOMETHING DIFFERENT IN THE WAY HE TREATED PEOPLE, THE WAY HE CARED, THE WAY HE LOVED.

THIS WEEK, I HAD OCCASION TO SET UP EVERYTHING I OWN RELATED TO VINCENT VAN GOGH.

IT TOOK THREE EIGHT-FOOT TABLES, SEVERAL EASELS ALONG WITH SEVERAL HOURS.

IT SEEMED FITTING TO SPEND SO MUCH TIME ON SUCH A PROJECT DURING A WEEK IN WHICH WE WOULD BE FOCUSING OUR ATTENTION ON THE WAY JESUS WAS DECLARED “CRAZY” AND “OUT OF HIS MIND.”

THERE WERE SOME OBVIOUSLY LEGITIMATE REASONS THAT VINCENT'S MENTAL STABILITY WAS SOMETIMES QUESTIONED.

BUT THERE WERE JUST AS MANY TIMES WHEN HE WAS CALLED “CRAZY” AND “OUT OF HIS MIND” FOR DOING PRECISELY THE THINGS THAT HE KNEW IN HIS HEART CHRIST HAD CALLED HIM TO DO.

HE OFFERED SUPPORT, ENCOURAGEMENT, COMPASSION & CARE FOR THOSE WHO’D BEEN REJECTED BY RESPECTABLE SOCIETY.

HE ONCE TORE UP HIS CLOTHES TO USE THEM AS BANDAGES FOR THOSE INJURED IN A MINING ACCIDENT.

WHEN HIS WARDROBE CONSISTED OF BUT TWO SETS OF CLOTHING, HE GAVE ONE AWAY.

WITH A SINGLE, THREADBARE BLANKET TO KEEP HIM WARM, HE GAVE IT TO SOMEONE HE THOUGHT NEEDED IT MORE THAN HE DID.

WHEN YOU LOOK AT ACTIONS SUCH AS THOSE, ACCORDING TO THE STANDARDS OF SOCIETY, VINCENT WAS DEFINITELY CRAZY & CLEARLY OUT OF HIS MIND & PEOPLE WERE CONSTANTLY TELLING HIM SO – INCLUDING (AND PERHAPS *ESPECIALLY*) – CHURCH FOLKS.

WOULD THAT EVERYONE WHO CLAIMS TO BE A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST WAS AS CRAZY & OUT OF THEIR MIND AS VINCENT WAS.

HE LIVED HIS LIFE “GOING AFTER JESUS” IN THAT SECOND WAY – TRYING AS BEST HE COULD TO BECOME THE PERSON GOD WAS CALLING HIM TO BE.

BUT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW THE CRAZIEST PART OF THIS PASSAGE?

YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT PROVIDES IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCE THAT – ACCORDING TO THE WAYS OF THE WORLD, THEN & NOW – JESUS WAS “OUT OF HIS MIND?”

IT'S IN THE FINAL VERSE WHEN HE'S OFFERING A NEW DEFINITION OF FAMILY.

HE SAYS, "HERE ARE MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS! WHOEVER DOES THE WILL OF GOD IS MY BROTHER & SISTER & MOTHER."

WITH THESE CRAZY WORDS, JESUS HAS BROADENED THE BOUNDARIES & EXPANDED THE BORDERS.

HE'S RE-DEFINING FAMILY & HE'S CHALLENGING ALL THE LITMUS TESTS OF ACCEPTABILITY.

YOU SEE, ANY TIME WE DRAW A LINE BETWEEN WHO'S IN & WHO'S OUT IN GOD'S KINGDOM, WE DISCOVER JESUS STANDING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT LINE, IDENTIFYING WITH THOSE WE'VE REJECTED & TURNED ASIDE.

HE'S STANDING WITH *THEM*, OFFERING LOVE, COMPASSION & MERCY.

IT'S NOT EASY TO STEP OVER THAT LINE & STAND WITH JESUS.

IT'S MUCH EASIER TO BE ONE OF THOSE WHO'S "GOING AFTER JESUS" TO SILENCE HIS MADNESS THAN IT IS TO BE ONE OF THOSE "GOING AFTER JESUS" TO HELP HIM EXPAND THE BORDERS OF GOD'S LOVE.

IN FACT – AND LET'S JUST SAY IT – YOU'D BETTER BE PREPARED TO BE TOLD YOU'RE CRAZY IF YOU DO. AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*

