

“Out of His Mind”
Mark 3:20-35
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3rd Sunday after Pentecost
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So many people have come to hear Jesus speak that he can't even eat. He's living close to the edge. His family hears about it and gets concerned. The controversial healing, the non-stop preaching, the daily exorcisms. It all sounds, well, a little crazy. He has “gone out of his mind.” The text makes it sound like the people are the ones who say this, but the Greek is more ambiguous. It could be the crowd. It could be his family. He's gone out of his mind.

“Out of his mind” is literally, “he has stood outside.” He's stood outside of what is normal. He's stood outside of who is normal. It's every parent's worst nightmare. No one wants a religious wacko for a son.

The religious authorities are even more disparaging in their concerns. They accuse Jesus of working for the wrong side: Beelzebub: Satan. Not a person with horns and a red tail, but as Nibs Stroupe puts it “a demonic power that is actively engaged against the compassionate and reconciling love of God.”

Now if you're able to suspend your Jesus-does-no-wrong lens for a minute, I find it remarkable that by the 3rd chapter of the earliest Gospel in the Bible, Jesus has been accused of being crazy and doing evil. It's remarkable since the church has worked really hard to make Jesus seem the very opposite of those two things. We think is a rationale, predictably good kind of person. We think this one accused of standing outside, actually stands inside with us. He stands inside our norms, inside our boundaries, inside our churches. That's where we've tried to stick him. Jesus is on the inside with religious folk. That's where we've tried to plant him in the church.

We've worked really hard to make Jesus the enforcer of the church's status quo instead of the disrupter of it. To make him fit into our politics – liberal or conservative. To make him fit into our existing patterns of life. To make him fit into our weekly routines. To make him fit into our consumer habits and choices. Because we just know that no one wants to follow a religious wacko. And so we take Jesus and smooth down all the rough edges until he fits nicely into our reasonable, rational, well-managed lives, our consistent, well manicured ideologies.

Which can make the church so painfully boring. I think this is probably why I left the church when I got to college. By then I had decided that Jesus is a tame, rules following prude. What else can you say about someone who seems most interested in people who like to wear suits and sit still for an hour. People who don't party or cuss, rage or risk or pretend that they don't. The church's Jesus wasn't interested in anyone restless, or queer, or different. Jesus wasn't interested in anyone outside the norm.

In the quasi-evangelical tradition I grew up in there's a whole formula that reinforces that very idea. Somebody gives testimony about how their life has changed completely because of Jesus. Said person used to be a carousing, rebellious,

motorcycle riding free spirit until they found Jesus and ended up married, 2.5 kids, living in a split level in the suburbs. I think the message was supposed to be: before Jesus life is chaotic, out of control. After Jesus life is good and normal. But as a teenager I think I heard the opposite: before Jesus, life is way cool, exciting, filled with possibilities we can hardly imagine. After Jesus, life is dead.

Which is curious since it's the opposite of the Jesus we find in this text. This Jesus is so on fire with healing, and teaching that his own family thinks he's gone out of his mind. This Jesus is so willing to break convention that the religious leadership thinks he's allied himself with the devil. This Jesus is so willing to challenge authority that 3 chapters in the authorities are already agitated. Soon they'll be plotting over how to shut him down.

And if we feel some urge to censor all those rough parts of Jesus that seem a little too wacko, maybe it's because power that is actively engaged against the compassionate and reconciling love of God operates like that. Maybe those powers allied against God operate like that. Not with horns and little red tails, but through cultural norms that teach us to fear anything that stands outside them.

Teaching us to fear strangers and immigrants, to revile the poor instead of seeing the image of God in them. Teaching us to defer to power instead of challenging it, to ignore suffering on the street instead of listening to it, to retreat to our religious institutions for protection instead of going there to get fueled up for real discipleship. Teaching us to be wary of disputing our lives instead of welcoming the Spirit that brings us new life.

So strong are those dominant cultural norms that, instead of challenging them, the church so often adopts them. We take the crazy out of Jesus. We take the radical out of Jesus. We take the weird out of Jesus in the name of protecting the church, protecting our brand.

But far from saving the church, I think taking the crazy out Jesus is precisely what kills the church. I mean who wants to follow a religious leader who promises to take your odd life and beat everything out of it that is interesting, gifted, different, and possibility-filled? Who can get excited about a god who promises to end your adolescent hopefulness before it's ever begun. Who is going to follow a healer who's primary promise is stability, instead of the freedom that comes with being liberated from all those powers that turn us into slaves of Caesar?

Fortunately, for me, while in college, I had a mentor, a preacher, who challenged me on my acceptance of the old church-sponsored formula of the god of the status quo. I told this preacher I had left the church behind. Too boring. Not doing the work for change I wanted to do. Not doing anything interesting. He spoke directly to me, like someone short on time to worry about hurt egos. "Look at you," he said. "The harder you try to stand out the more you don't. Face facts: you're a white boy from the suburbs. Without Jesus, there is nothing interesting about you. The only remotely interesting thing about you is Jesus."

Which I suppose might be painful or offensive if it wasn't true. Jesus is the one who disrupts conventional, stale, banal living. It's what he does to you. It's where he takes you. It's who he connects you to and the power that brings to disrupt those power opposed to the compassionate and reconciling love of God. Look where he took some of us on Wednesday night at the BUILD action. Over

1,000 people gathered together. 500 Latino immigrants, some undocumented, took a risk to go to a public gathering where they knew there would be tv cameras. They've got no reason to trust you or me without Jesus pulling us together. A gospel choir from the Kingdom life church – sang a verse of their song in Spanish to make that community's ethic of hospitality plain. There's nothing to compel them to do that without Jesus whispering in their ears. White people from Roland Park called on the city's leadership to act on the same things as Black people from Harlem Park. That's allowed in our stay-in-your-lane culture. Given our history there's no reason to trust each other without Jesus running the show. The night's speakers that started out a few weeks ago as individuals became a team with a unified purpose – to make our city safe. A city with jobs. A city for youth. Jesus maybe be the only one who can pull that kind of Pentecostal moment off.

Jesus is the only thing remotely interesting not just about me, but about the church. This Savior critiqued by religious leaders for not being religious enough: critiqued for eating and drinking too much, hanging out with the wrong people, breaking rules you're not supposed to break. Despised by the elites because prostitutes were by his side, but also by activists who couldn't stomach his relationship with tax collectors and Pharisees. Jesus called anybody he wanted to join his movement – tax collectors, Pharisees, sinners, prostitutes, and people with disabilities including white boys from the suburbs.

Jesus is the best thing the church has going for it. I mean in the text today, Jesus compares his ministry to breaking and entering. He's like a thief who enters the strong man's house, ties him up, and plunders his property. A thief who sneaks up on Satan with the community that he gathers across race, across class, across nationality, across culture – the very unity and peace that this power against God's way tries to destroy.

And maybe it's just me but I can get a lot more excited about breaking and entering with Jesus than I can putting on a suit and sitting for an hour. In fact, the only reason I'm willing to sit and listen during this hour is because I know the sitting and listening isn't where the real action is. That's just the warmup for the main event. I can get excited about breaking and entering with Jesus into the headquarters of those forces opposed to God. Taking the fight to them. I can get excited about this crazy Savior from Nazareth who isn't afraid to redefine family when family becomes a barrier to our vocation instead of its primary support. I can get excited about an out-of-his-mind Savior who isn't afraid to challenge religious authorities, isn't afraid to meet people where they are and as they are. I can get excited about sneaking up on Satan and restraining evil with kindness, overwhelming selfishness with generosity, resisting war with words and signs of peace. I can get excited about Jesus.

And maybe the church needs to step back from all of our plotting and planning about how to approach this generation, or how to adopt this style or that, and take a fresh look at the treasure at the heart of our faith. The treasure of this out-of-his-mind Savior who would lead us exactly where we all need to go, if we followed him. Because what some of us really want – truly want – somewhere insides - isn't to be shielded from chaos in the world. It's not to have our lives so calm that there's no fire there to warm things up. It's not to rid the church of its

unpredictable, radical, wacko Jesus. It's to love so deeply, to share so generously, to welcome so enthusiastically, to fight for justice so clear that people point and say, "look at them, they've gone out of their mind!"