

November 08, 2009

Mark 12:38-44

Are Crazy?

The essence of the gospel is paradox and preposterousness:

The way up is down, the way in is out, the way high is low. Jesus turns the world upside-down, and invites us to an upside-down way of living, an inside-out way of thinking.

Are you brave enough to be a Crazy? Jesus spent most of his ministry promoting "Crazy" thinking - urging his disciples to join with him in the Crazy pursuit of faithfulness and fulfillment.

The Kingdom of God, Jesus insisted, would be filled with Crazy - people who believe the first are last, the greatest are the least, the strong are the weak, and the meek win it all.

What is a Crazy Dog? The Crow Native American Indians used to rise out of the ruts in their lives by engaging in what they called "Crazy Dog" activities.

Being a Crazy Dog could mean simple things like purposefully eating dinner for breakfast, wearing your clothes inside-out, or beating a drum from midnight to six in the morning.

Being a Crazy Dog also meant taking more self-risking steps - daring to be seen as foolish or weak or strange - for the sake of others and for your own sense of well-being.

Brian Bowne Walker in his book *The Crazy Dog Guide to Lifetime Happiness*, ...

suggests participating in such silly activities as taking a few hours to follow your dog around doing exactly what the dog does (well, almost exactly!).

On the more serious side, Walker's advice for dealing with difficult people and painful situations is called "Be Bigger Than You Are."

Instead of teaching ways to avoid them or outsmart them, Walker recommends taking the "Crazy Dog" route and truly listening to the gripes of your co-worker, relative or neighbor.

In fact, invite the most nasty-tempered, unlovable character you know to air their grievances to you, and then be big enough - indeed "bigger than you are" - to take it on and then let it roll off your back.

Jesus called this being a "servant:" making the "last come first," exalting the meek and lowly over the rich and powerful.

Some accused Jesus of being "Crazy," because he was constantly standing conventional practices and perspectives on their heads. Of course, it was in his divine nature.

From the beginning Jews were accused of being crazy

It began with Abraham and Sarah, two "crazies" who had the ridiculous notion that although they were elderly, God was calling them to leave their home, wander off to new territory, and was about to make them new parents - first of a son and ultimately of an entire nation.

Whenever the Jews confronted obstacles faithfully, it usually called for a Crazy response to the circumstances.

Moses was certainly "crazy" when he confronted the all-powerful Pharaoh with the ultimatum, "Let my people go."

Militarily Joshua clearly qualified as Crazy, as did Deborah and, of course, David.

After the decline of Israel as a state, the Crazy conviction re-emerged in some of the antics of the prophets - think of Elijah, Jeremiah, or Hosea - and in the bravery of individuals like Esther and Ruth.

God's craziness got even crazier when the time for the Messiah finally arrived.

Defying "good" sense and "Common" sensibilities, Jesus came out of Nazareth ("Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"), his disciples wondered.

Although born out of the line of David, Jesus actually arrived as the first-born in the family of a poor construction worker from a small town in a long conquered land.

Throughout his unpredictable life Jesus performed crazy stunts - eating with tax collectors and publicans, associating with prostitutes, lepers, the poor, the sick and the uneducated.

Jesus became fairly popular but then risked everything by traveling to Jerusalem and needling the religious establishment to within an inch of its patience, and then beyond its tolerance.

The culmination of Jesus' life and work was the biggest Crazy commitment of all time - his passion and death on the cross, followed by the miracle of his resurrection and of all creation's redemption.

Author John Updike's, who died in January wrote an essay entitled Incarnation. It is on the Gospel of Matthew, but his observation applied to the entire gospel narratives, where "two worlds are colliding.

Jesus overthrows common sense ... and declares an inversion of the world's order." John Updike wrote:

"Jesus declares an inversion of the world's order, whereby the first shall be last and the last first, the meek shall inherit the earth, the hungry and thirsty shall be satisfied, and the poor in spirit shall possess the Kingdom of Heaven.

This Kingdom is the hope and pain of Christianity; it is attained against the grain, through the denial of instinctive and social wisdom and through faith in the unseen."

Unfortunately, Christians forget too often that our heart lies in trusting God's craziness rather than in human craftiness.

We are more comfortable rebuilding, carefully and dully, all those wrong roads and ruts to faith that Jesus spent so much time trying to repudiate.

Like the lambasted scribes we want to wear "long robes" to distinguish us as righteous and educated and respectable.

We prefer to live so that we might receive honor and recognition in the "marketplace," the "temple" and at "banquets," rather than risking ourselves and our status by practicing Jesus' upside-down/inside-out, Crazy attitude towards life and faith.

But even as Christians continue to resist Jesus' call to think and act Crazy, other institutions are beginning to recognize the creative power of an upside-down/inside-out approach to life.

There is emerging a new old way of thinking about the world which is coming from a host of different sources.

From the economic world comes the concept of "upside-down thinking," as introduced by Charles B. Handy's book in *The Age of Unreason*

(Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press,):

"Upside-down thinking wonders why roads are free and railroads expensive in most countries, and suspects that it ought to be the other way around, as it is in Italy"

"Upside-down thinking is like brainstorming. It is easy to think of violent objections to every idea. It is easy but unwise.

It is unwise because that will stop the idea in its tracks, before it has had a chance to stretch itself to get nudged into shape and, perhaps, to speak other and better ideas.

It is easy to listen to a new idea and say 'Why?' It is more exciting to listen and say, 'Why not?'"

Jesus was always saying "why not" - why not associate with tax collectors? Why not heal on the Sabbath? Why not ride "triumphally" into Jerusalem on a donkey instead of on a magnificent war-horse?

"Why not" is a response that opens the door for change.

Jesus called his twelve disciples and all their successors to be next generation leaders - people of faith who refuse to give yesterday's answers to tomorrow's problems.

We are called not simply to observe the changes happening all around us, or even to simply participate or experience those changes.

Page 6

By asking "why not?" by considering unexpected, upside-down, Crazy possibilities, Jesus calls us to actually construct change.

We are to be the architects of change, building on our past, yet making new patterns to deal with the new potentialities we confront.

So go on - be Crazy!

Amen.