

Proper 5-B
June 9-10, 2018
St. John's Cathedral

I bought a car this past week – always a bit of a traumatic experience for me. And the first thing I did to it, after setting up the hands-free phone connection, was to attach a bumper sticker with some words from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry: “We are the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement.” This is not a familiar description of the Episcopal Church, at least in my experience.

I chose this partly because I really like Bishop Curry's focus. And also because the gospel readings this week and last week got me thinking about what this “Jesus Movement” might mean for us.

The last two Sundays our readings from Mark's gospel have showed us some ways that Jesus was getting into hot water early in his ministry. Last week we heard how he challenged the religious rules for the Sabbath in two ways: First, by gleaning grain from fields with his disciples and the second, by healing a man with a withered hand.

For both of these things he got into trouble with the religious establishment for rule-breaking. The way Mark tells the story, Jesus comes down on the side of compassion -- feeding and healing -- and the religious professionals come down on the side of keeping the rules. Ultimately, Mark tells us that the Pharisees went out and began hatching plans with the Roman authorities to destroy Jesus. Clearly Jesus, who was beginning to attract a large following, was getting under their skin.

Today we heard a sequel to this Sabbath controversy. As Jesus traveled around the region large crowds came to him for healing – to be restored to wholeness.

Where we join the story today, Jesus had gone home and huge crowds again began to gather to be near him. As his family looked on, they were puzzled and alarmed and tried to restrain him. They were trying to figure out what was going on with him. Some people said he was going out of his mind. The religious scribes suspected that he was invoking demons – more or less like black magic. He was in hot water again. This time for healing and perhaps for popular appeal.

Was Jesus really out of his mind? Or was he showing a new way to uncover God's power and presence in the world? A way that captured the hearts and hopes of those who followed him.

As I spent time with this passage this week, I remembered a sermon that I heard Bishop Curry preach in 2012 to the General Convention in Indianapolis. Bishop Curry really liked the accusation that Jesus might be a little crazy. That Jesus said and did things that upset some of those who were there to preserve the status quo. For him those peculiar things weren't bad things, – they were good things, he said – things that Jesus did to reveal the dream of God for this world. A dream of peace, harmony, generosity, compassion, wholeness.

Those early followers who formed those crowds had somehow caught the vision – had God's dream opened to them through the preaching, the teaching, the compassion, the healing of Jesus. They were energized. They wanted to be part of this.

This narrative comes to us through the gospels. But this isn't confined to history. It moves through history and into the present. It is about us as well. Bishop Curry argues that we need some of those crazy Christians who catch a glimpse of the transforming, transfiguring, life-changing vision of Jesus. Of a world of wholeness, respect, openness, compassion, community. And we are poised and invited to do this. This is what it means to be part of the Jesus Movement.

How do we get on board? It begins, I think with meeting Jesus – again and again – first, through the gospels. Taking the Bible seriously. I was visiting a church on the East Coast one summer where, when the deacon read the gospel at the Eucharist, he first shouted, “Be attentive! Be attentive!”

“Listen up,” he was saying. When we really listen and absorb those gospel accounts, we can be opened and changed. When we share them in conversation (as we did this past Lent with the Gospel of John), we can be opened and changed.

We also have some wonderfully crazy role models in the past and present -- those who are brave and crazy enough to carry on Jesus' work in this world. Sometimes we call them saints – whether those are the famous saints of history or the saints that surround us and inspire us in our every-day lives. In one way, they are just ordinary people – but in another way, they show us something extraordinary . We rub elbows with them in church. We meet them in the wider community. We learn from them – are inspired by them.

Evelyn Underhill, the 20th century English mystic and spiritual writer said, those saints serve God, not by standing aloof, "wrapped in delightful prayers...but

by going down into the mess and there, right down in the mess, they are able to radiate God because they possess Him."

Perhaps that would seem crazy to some – or at the very least, risky. But it is part of the call. Part of the journey.

Going down into the mess may seem like an odd call, but it is what Jesus modeled for us. He modeled it by sharing this dream of a world where God's love, not enmity, would pervade our lives. Where all would be respected. Where we would share from our abundance to support the lives of those who have little. Where we would summon compassion for those who suffer or are rejected.

We are in a complex and often confusing time in our country right now. There is great division – sometimes fueled by harsh rhetoric. In the Spokane community we've seen racist flyers and posters appearing in public areas. We wonder how to receive refugees and immigrants with both grace and security. Sometimes we feel anxious about the climate of international relations. And sometimes we feel powerless to do anything about any of this and more. The best word I've found to describe this feeling (at least as I experience it) is 'disquietude.'

We ask, What is God's dream for us in this time and how do we help it to come about.? The Jesus Movement – that hope to live into God's dream for us – might seem, in Bishop Curry's words, as a way to move ahead. We wonder how we are equipped to change the world in this way.

Last Sunday, our bishop confirmed six people here at the Cathedral and we received one new member. Five of the seven were youth. During that service all of

us stood in support of these people who were making new commitments and joined with them in the baptismal covenant.

This is something we do from time to time, but it is far from routine. Every time we join in this covenant, we are, in a sense recommitting ourselves to the Jesus Movement. We don't usually say it that way, but that's what we're doing. Here's what we promised together (loosely paraphrased): To continue to worship and pray; to resist evil and, when we mess up, turn to God; to live our lives in ways that share the generous love of God; to seek and serve Christ in every single person we encounter; to work for justice and peace and respect the dignity of all. We make all of these promises, asking God's help to live them out.

Love is at the center. The unconditional, unwavering love of God that surrounds us and all who inhabit this planet. This is what Jesus showed us and continues to show us. That love drives and sustains this movement.

This is the way we choose to walk with Jesus. This is the way we are called to walk with Jesus. This is a path on that journey toward God's dream.

Is it crazy? Maybe, but in the very best of ways.

Oh, and if you'd like a bumper sticker see me later.