



Bishop Sid's sermon for delivery on June 10th, 2018

A note to the presenter of this sermon:

First, thank you for coming forward to present the message today. For many of you, this may be your first time delivering a sermon. To you, special thanks for delivering the sermon with your heart pounding just a little faster than usual—perhaps. If you are a rostered minister who is back for Sunday from convention, please feel free to make use of the sermon either in whole or in part.

I will be preaching a version of this sermon for the synod gathered in convention in Regina.

Peace,

Bishop Sid

Sisters and brothers

Travelling as your bishop for nearly four years has been such a privilege. I've been with you in urban and rural settings. I will not soon forget the Reformation Commemoration services in Prince Albert, Saskatoon and Regina. Gathering in those ecumenical settings with a beautifully formed liturgy of music and scripture and prayer was wonderful. We gathered as a faith community and were reminded that we are not alone, that God is with us, and that we have sisters and brothers beyond our familiar communities. But perhaps my favorite service of these past four years was at Birch River, Manitoba. We gathered to worship—maybe fifteen of us—in a little church with a tiny balcony. Pastor Bob led a simple liturgy with a guitar. We didn't take on a big ornate worship service that would fill a cathedral; nor would the intimate service we did take on fit in a cathedral. We sang. We prayed. We experienced the Gospel in word and sacrament. And afterward we met over coffee and over some sweet things and talked about what was going on in the community and what we could do as church.

The worship we do across the synod, the worship you are taking on this morning, may well take different forms, but each service orbits like a planet around one thing: The Gospel of Jesus.

I would preach to you the Gospel this morning, that is the central inspiration of who we are in large or small faith communities, as old or young people, as we follow Jesus.

But first, join with me in a word of prayer from the work of William Sloane Coffin:

O Lord, take our mouths and speak through them;

Take our hands and work through them,

Take our minds and think through them,

And take our hearts and set them on fire.

Amen.

The Gospel, to tell you the truth, comes in an odd form today. Today's gospel is an odd little story we rarely tell, except when it comes up on this Sunday in the year of Mark. To help us understand it in context, let me set the text in its broad setting in the Gospel.

Each of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, have a similar broad geographical shape. The geographical shape resembles a sort of Saskatchewan geography. Picture a province with Galilee in the North, Samaria in the middle, and Judea in the south. The gospel narrative follows this geographical shape with Part one telling of the one-year ministry of Jesus in the north, in Galilee; and Part two, following Jesus' one week in Judea, his week in Jerusalem from Palm Sunday to Easter Day.

Our text comes from Chapter 3 of Mark so takes place early in Jesus' ministry in Galilee. Mark's narrative begins at a blazing speed. As you may remember Mark takes no time to tell the birth stories of Jesus with angels and shepherds as Luke does, nor of wisemen and a star as Matthew does. No, in Mark's gospel Jesus simply comes out of Nazareth in Galilee; he comes out of the north country. Then this Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist and as the water comes on him, Jesus hears the Voice saying, "You are my beloved Son." After 40 days of testing in the wilderness, Jesus emerges with this key message of the Gospel: "The kingdom of God is breaking in." The Dream of God is at the door. Open your eyes.

Now, how might you think this Jesus is going to go about bringing in the reign of God, the dream of God? You might expect Jesus to recruit a large force of influential people who were at the same time giants of faith. That would make sense, right? But you remember who he calls together. He calls together a band of disciples, apprentices that no one would have chosen. There was Pete, the fisherman, wearing a muscle shirt, tanned from daily work on the sea. He called other fisherman: brothers James and John. These are the same brothers who, much later, would hear Jesus speak passionately of his coming suffering and death in Jerusalem. Do you know how they responded? Was it, "I'm so sorry. Can we pray for you, Jesus?" No, they said this: "So Jesus, when we win, could the two of us—your best people, of course—sit on your right and left as your two main generals at the victory banquet?" When the other disciples found out, of course, they were angry at James and John—mostly because they didn't think of it first.

So Jesus calls apprentices to lead this revolution who are ordinary folk. They are broken, struggling, human beings. They get it all right sometimes. They get it all wrong at others. This is who Jesus chooses. People like us. What a crazy idea.

So the Galilean ministry of Jesus begins with Jesus calling the apprentices, the disciples, the church to follow along. The church watched Jesus bless and heal. They watched carefully. They knew this would be their calling as well: to bring blessing and healing to the world. They watched Jesus heal. He brought healing to a man who had spent years lost in mental and spiritual chaos. He brought healing to a foreigner with a sick daughter. He brought physical healing to a hungry crowd of 5000.

They watched him bless. Jesus, it seems, would sit down at table with anyone. In Galilee, some in the Jewish community had decided that working with the Roman invading force was money that was too good to pass up. They were the tax-collectors. The Roman empire worked with these people to levy tax on their own people. Who wanted to sit down with these good-for-nothing greedy traitors? No one. But guess who did? Jesus. And his puzzled apprentices must have thought, "How crazy is that!"

The early ministry of Jesus in Galilee that started fast, continues at break-neck speed. Jesus heals and blesses. Crowds gather. Jesus preaches the Gospel. Crowds gather. From time to time Jesus would be worn out and would withdraw for prayer—but very soon the crowds would find him again.

During the hectic pace of Jesus' early ministry, we find our text for this day. Once again, a crowd has gathered around Jesus, this time so closely that "they could not even eat a meal." Literally, the Greek text says, "they could not even eat bread." Get the picture. On this day with the crowd gathered around Jesus listen to three scenes in this odd little text.

Scene 1: Our text says: *When his mother and brothers heard of this, they set out to take charge of him; they said, 'He is out of his mind.'* They thought, 'He is beside himself.' So, his family set out to collect him, to give him some chicken soup and try to settle Jesus down. Who could blame them? Their son, their brother had been wandering the countryside with this collection of ragtag disciples claiming to be at work on the 'dream of God.' It seemed crazy to them. Their son, their brother, is out there eating with anyone, blessing everyone, including the people everyone knew were just good-for-nothings. Is it any wonder his family thought he had lost his mind! If they thought he was crazy now, wait till he tells his disciples to feed a crowd of 5000 people with 5 loaves of bread and two fish sticks? So, his family thought, "He's crazy. We need to bring him back home." And who could blame them?

Scene Two: Our text reads: *Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him.* The family tracks Jesus down. They find the crowd and see Jesus among them. The Family decides not to get into the crowd. Can you imagine the sort of crowd that gathered round this crazy Jesus? Tax collectors, the poor, outsiders, you name it! So, they stood outside and sent a message to Jesus to come out and join them. That was way safer! The crowd around Jesus says: *'Look, your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.* You see, the outsiders 'get it'. 'Who are we', they say. 'What claim have we on you, Jesus. Your family is outside. 'So long, Jesus. It's been good to know you.'

Now listen to Scene 3. Jesus looks around at the circle of people sitting around him: Pete the fisherman; brothers James and John; sisters Mary and Martha; Thomas the intellectual; Simon the Zealot. And in his eyes far away does he see the wide, wide circle of all who would follow in the future—including you and including me. And with his eyes scanning that wide circle he said these words to all of us:

Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother.'

Sisters and brothers of Jesus, do you hear those words this morning? We are the family of Jesus. And brothers and sisters, do you hear that call to follow Jesus?

You know, it is a crazy call, this call to follow Jesus. Your family may not always get it. Jesus' mother and brothers at the beginning thought he was crazy! I love how Bishop Michael Curry put it in the title of one of his books. Michael as you may now know, is the American Episcopalian primate. You may well have heard some amazing preaching at the Royal Wedding a short while ago. That was Michael. The title of the book is, *"Crazy Christians: A call to follow Jesus."* We need, he says, more Crazy Christians, caught up in the call to follow Jesus. Isn't it true that we can become so caught up in being cautious and appropriate, can become so caught up in not making a mistake in the work of the church; that we don't allow the Spirit to push us out into crazy. Into Crazy love. Crazy sacrifice. Crazy blessing. I wonder what that would look like for you in your context as a church or as an individual follower of Jesus. One of Bishop Curry's stories from his book, inspires me where I live. I hope it inspires you as you hear it. Rev. Curry was on a flight not long after 9/11. He says, he was startled as he looked at the passenger beside him. He writes, "now I don't hold to racial profiling. . .but the man next to me was clearly from the Middle east." He added, "I have to admit, I wondered. . .is he a terrorist." Well, Michael adds, as it turned out, he wasn't. It turned out he was an American of Pakistani descent, a physician on his way to a conference. "We exchanged stories," Michael said. We showed each other pictures of our families on our phones. Michael added, "I felt guilty for having judged him by his appearance." But here it comes.

He said that before the flight was over the man asked him, 'Could we pray together for the world?' Michael says, "I have prayed with Catholics; I've prayed with Baptists, I've prayed with agnostics. . . I wasn't sure how to pray with a Muslim." Be he said, "I knew Jesus would have done just that." So, we did. "Hand in hand. We did."

Bishop Curry closes, "*As we prayed I could see the dream—the dream of a world where the gospel of love is lived and is real. The dream of a world in which the bridges of love are built and the highways of justice are established. The dream of a world where there is no more hunger, no more war, no more poverty, no more harm.*" *The dream of humanity reconciled to God and to each other and to all creation.*"

So, sisters and brothers, brothers and sisters of Jesus, listen for your call to do crazy things.

To gather and worship in cathedrals and little churches. To gather to experience the Gospel in Word and sacrament. Who thinks that makes sense in our world? We do.

To feed the hungry. To bring healing to those who are hurting in body or mind or spirit. Who thinks that make sense in our world? We do.

To sit at table and bring blessing to those the world would rather forget. Who thinks that makes sense in the world? We do.

The Dream of God is among us. Open your eyes sisters and brothers of Jesus. And live the dream of God, the Gospel of Jesus, wherever you live and work; rest and play! Live it out in ways the world may think is crazy. Live it out with the passion of a follower of Jesus:

O Lord, take our mouths and speak through them;

Take our hands and work through them,

Take our minds and think through them,

And take our hearts and set them on fire.

Amen