

Pentecost 2 – 9am Wesley – 10th June 2012

Theme: 'Is Jesus out of his mind – 'crazy', if you like?

Reading: Mark 3: 20-35

'people said: "He is out of his mind.'" Mark 3:21b

Introduction

The Gospel for today is quite a challenge that raises two awkward questions for us to contemplate.

Was Jesus out of his mind – a little crazy if you like?

Secondly, can we find a balance between our faith and other priorities in life?

Re-reading this passage for today, certainly made me feel a little uncomfortable as I had to think about how to open up this difficult passage of Scripture for us to reflect upon.

Let's begin by Encountering Mark and a little background

Firstly, we need to be reminded that Mark's Gospel is full of conflict in which Jesus deals with uncomprehending disciples, family and criticism from the authorities of the day.

In this little account from Mark for us in today's reading, Jesus has difficulty with his family. His family or others (it is hard to discern who actually has told the family) charges that "He is out of his mind." Jesus responds with talk of Beelzebul, probably because he was associated with demonic possession and insanity. This was a typical response towards people who were different from what was considered 'normal'. Probably today we may say a person is 'eccentric', 'a little out of alignment' or 'out there' to use some colloquialisms. We may also use the highly technical term 'they're mad' which can cover a host of things. An insane person however is some-one who is out of touch with reality, a person who, in his or her mind, is living in another world. Clearly Jesus has come proclaiming and enacting a very different sort of reality, another world that is counter to many people's expectations of reality. Jesus' reality is named 'kingdom of God', a place, a system of values, a set of assumptions and expectations that is counter to the way many may think the world works. Thus Jesus is dismissed as 'out of his mind' – he's in another frame of reference, another consciousness – the kingdom of God. Reflect on that for a moment. I like the words 'a different frame of reference'. What does that say to you? Does it make Jesus 'out of his mind'?

A personal story

When I became a Christian I was part way through my first year at university. I was struggling with the transition from school, where I had been head prefect, captain of athletics,

in the first eleven cricket team and enjoyed my football. I had a great social life and a relatively wide circle of friends. I went from a big fish in a small pond, to a fry in an ocean. I didn't cope well with the transition either socially or academically.

However, it made me look at priorities in life, value systems and what I wanted out of life. It was in that context that I made a decision for Christ which was not a popular decision with some of my non Christian friends. Suddenly for me, I no longer wanted to be 'in their world'. I am certain they thought I was 'out of my mind' or a 'little crazy' because my priorities in life had changed. My reference point had altered and life had changed.

I share a little of my personal story because I think it is important to look at ourselves in the light of this unusual story about Jesus. His world picture and spiritual picture was quite different to what people thought it ought to be and this led to the challenge about his sanity.

I'm sure my family questioned my sanity on occasions, and still do. Also the office staff sometimes have similar questions especially hearing and working with me!

Was Jesus sane or was he a little crazy? Depends how you look at the circumstances!!

The second question – balancing priorities?

"The crowdtold him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'" "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. John 3:32-33

For Jesus, and for those men and women who left all to follow him, loyalty to God was the first, unassailable priority. It wasn't to be the cultural customs of his community, not the assumed wisdom of the religious leaders, not the precious law of Moses as interpreted by the Pharisees, not even loyalty to family – mother, father, sister, brother, wife or husband. Doing what God wants is always the first priority. Suddenly, those around him, those followers had become family.

I confess that I struggle with this section of the Gospel. It is unsettling. Why do I struggle?

Firstly, because this passage has been abused by sects and used to disconnect the love bonds between families over the centuries. Jesus was making a point here but in reality it didn't break the kinship bonds that found Mary at the foot of the cross or at the empty tomb. Rather Jesus is making the point that suddenly you have, in a real sense, a faith family which is hugely important.

The second reason I struggle with this passage is the damage it can do to your personal family when you don't find a balance between faith and family. In my first parish in Burra in South Australia, in some ways my family came a bad second to my ministry in the church. I had to look both at myself, my faith and my priorities in life to see that God was not asking me to destroy my family relationships but rather to prioritise and balance my life.

Jesus is strong in making a point here. But his family obviously loved him and had come 'to rescue' him. This however was not the time to do it and at this moment Jesus made it clear that his followers had become 'his family'.

I don't have any easy answers here except to say that there have been times when the church has prevailed in my life and at other times the family has come first. It still is a constant challenge for me in ministry. There is no easy line to say church on this side and family on that side. Both become enmeshed together at times but then on other occasions there is a separation.

As an aside, one of the hardest things in ministry is having your office in your family home. I had that for nine years and have made a distinction for the past 25 years of having an office away from the home. Parish work can intrude and take over family work. Priorities and boundaries have to be set for survival, I have found.

I don't know the answer to this question but I believe Jesus calls us to find a balance between family, faith and God that works for us.

Conclusion

Was Jesus out of his mind? In one way 'yes' – he had a different reference point to the worldly view – a spiritual view that was not of this world. One of the struggles we have as Christians is to live our faith in the world but not to be taken over by it. That is always an ongoing challenge.

The second aspect of family and faith family can also be an ongoing challenge. No easy answers for us in the Gospel today but plenty to think about as we live out our faith.

Amen.