

Pentecost 6, Proper 9, 070812  
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Amen.

Good morning.

Long ago and far away, somewhere near the middle of the third quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, my family and I moved to Nashville, TN, where I began 7<sup>th</sup> grade in the fall. We started going to St. David's Episcopal Church not far from our house and became involved in everything there was to do there. Over the years, we were (between us) choir members, Sunday School students and teachers, Director of Christian Education (Mama), EYC President (me), first woman on the Vestry (Mama), interim Rector (Daddy), and first 'girl acolyte' (me). When I became a seminarian at the School of Theology in Sewanee, St. David's sponsored me.

I think it was during the summer after my first year at Sewanee (in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE) that I was invited to come and preach one Sunday at St. David's. I had spent the summer in Kansas City, Kansas doing Clinical Pastoral Education in a hospital there with some other seminarians from around the country. During our 12 week stay, another Episcopalian from the group and I were asked to go to 2 tiny churches out in the country to read Morning Prayer and preach for a priest who was going on vacation that weekend. We flipped a coin to see who would do what. Liza was to be the presider; I was to preach. Before this Sunday, I had preached once at the end of my junior (first) year in a class where we were video'd so we would know what we looked like to a congregation, or something like that. These churches in the country would be the second time to preach - and what I counted to be the first real sermon for me.

When I came back from Kansas City with a 'professional' gig under my belt, I thought going to St. David's would be a piece of cake! I don't have any idea what the lessons were that day, and I don't remember a thing about what I preached. There wasn't a Revised Common Lectionary then. The 'new' Book of Common Prayer hadn't even been ratified yet. Everything the church did was still from one form or another of the Trial Use books - if you've been an Episcopalian for a long time, you might remember the green book, the zebra book, and other interestingly named experiments in liturgy. But I was one of those few 'cradle' Episcopalians mentioned

by Ruth in her sermon a couple of weeks ago, so I thought I could handle everything. Boy, was I wrong!

When the Sunday rolled around, I was a nervous wreck! I realized that I was going to be standing in front of people I had known since I was 12, and worse, in front of people who had known ME since I was 12: a one-time boyfriend, people I had babysat for, my 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher (who I hoped didn't remember how much I didn't like her), and a host of adults I looked up to as a kid. How in the world would I stand up as an adult in front of all these people and expect them to listen to what I had to say?

Well, I made it through the sermon and the rest of the service. The Rector asked me to stand with him to greet people as they left the church. All sorts of people told me what a great job I had done, or that it was great to see me, and I finally began to relax. But near the end of the line, a woman who was a good friend of my parents came up to me and said, "Be not puffed up, Mary! Be ye not puffed up." It was like a pin letting the air out of a balloon. All the good stuff disappeared into thin air because of that one comment.

I have never forgotten that. I think about it more often than just when this lesson comes around once every three years, too. And I can't imagine what it must have felt like to Jesus to hear some friend of his mother telling him that he had gotten too big for his britches - and worse - from the others in the synagogue who had known him when he was a kid, who knew he was just a carpenter, a menial laborer, and someone whose parentage was questionable. He had been doing well in his ministry already, healing people, raising that little girl from the dead, and people from all around were talking about him. He must have thought that going home to preach in front of his family and friends would be a piece of cake. Boy, was he wrong! And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Mark says he could do no deeds of power there. So, he could have gone off in a pout. He could have had a pity party and told himself that he might as well quit this ministry business if his own hometown was going to put him down that way.

But he cured some more sick people anyway. And then, in the second story, Jesus went around to other villages teaching. And he called the twelve disciples who were already traveling with him and sent them out two by two, giving them authority over unclean spirits. He told them to travel light, to accept the hospitality that was

offered them, and where none was offered, to shake the dust off their feet and move on. So they went and were successful in casting out many demons and curing many who were sick.

It seems to me that the point of putting these two stories back-to-back is to show that Jesus' ministry was not and is not a single one - that is, not one carried out by Jesus alone. As people were attempting over and over to make him the Messiah, they were missing the point of his message that the Reign of God was already present and that they were invited to participate in it. "Follow me," means less to point, observe, or marvel and more about joining with, taking up the message and doing the deeds. Sound familiar?

Just a month ago, we read from a different chapter of Mark, which also described a visit by Jesus to his hometown. In the *Revised Standard Version* of these verses, Jesus' mother and siblings come to get him because people were saying he had lost his mind. In the *Contemporary English Version* of the Bible, however, it says, "When Jesus' family heard what he was doing, they thought he was crazy and went to get him under control."

Yesterday, the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, a modern-day prophet and fabulous preacher, and bishop of North Carolina, preached at the daily Eucharist of General Convention in Indianapolis, using this version of the reading from Mark as his text. He asked the congregation to forgive him for the way he was saying it, "but Jesus was, and is, crazy!"

Take the Sermon on the Mount, he says: what the world says is wretched, Jesus calls blessed. Blessed are the poor and poor in spirit; the merciful and compassionate; blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the sake of justice; blessed are those who work for peace. Those are crazy things. Jesus said love your enemies, bless those who curse you, bless those who use you. He was crazy. And while people were killing him, he prayed, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." *Now that's crazy.* (Curry)

And he said that those who would follow him are called to be as crazy as Jesus!

Bishop Curry said,

"We need some Christians who are as crazy as the Lord. Crazy enough to love like Jesus, to give like Jesus, to forgive like Jesus, to do justice, love mercy,

walk humbly with God — like Jesus. Crazy enough to dare to change the world from the nightmare it often is into something close to the dream that God dreams for it. And for those who would follow him, those who would be his disciples, those who would live as and be the people of the Way? It might come as a shock, but they are called to craziness.

"We need some crazy Christians. Sane, sanitized Christianity is killing us. That may have worked once upon a time, but it won't carry the Gospel anymore. We need some ... Christians crazy enough to believe that God is real and that Jesus lives. Crazy enough to follow the radical way of the Gospel. Crazy enough to believe that the love of God is greater than all the powers of evil and death. Crazy enough to believe, as Dr. King often said, that though "the moral arc of the universe is long, it bends toward justice." We need some Christians crazy enough to believe that children don't have to go to bed hungry; that the world doesn't have to be the way it often seems to be; that there is a way to lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside; that as the slaves used to sing, "There's plenty good room in my Father's kingdom," because every human being has been created in the image of God, and we are all equally children of God and meant to be treated as such."

Are we crazy enough to be this kind of Christian?