
That's Crazy Good, Right?!

A sermon by Canon George Maxwell
Proper 5 – Year B

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’”

I heard a story recently about an 11-year-old girl. She was sitting in class one day and they were analyzing a commercial for dishwashing soap. And the tagline of the commercial was, “Women all over America are fighting greasy dishes.” Immediately two boys in the class said, “That’s right. That’s where women belong — in the kitchen.”

She was hurt. She was angry. She was confused. But when she got home and told her father about the class, he suggested that she write several letters expressing her concern.

She decided she would start at the top, so she wrote one letter to the woman who was then the First Lady of the country, Hillary Clinton. And then she wrote a second letter to the anchor of the children’s news showed that she watched on television, Linda Ellerbee. And then she wrote several other letters to prominent lawyers and other officials she thought could help. I know what you’re thinking.

But here’s the thing: they wrote back. Each of those people wrote an encouraging letter back and told her to keep at it, stay on the path, do what she could do.

Linda Ellerbee sent a camera crew to her school and they filmed what they needed to film in order to tell her story. In about a month, the manufacturer of the dishwashing liquid, Procter & Gamble, no small company, changed the tagline. From then on, it said, “*People* all over America are fighting greasy dishes.”

And the career of a social activist was born in the heart of that 11-year-old.

Now that’s crazy, right? An 11-year-old writes a couple of letters and Procter & Gamble changes a commercial?

And if we are to follow Christ, we are going to find ourselves called to do crazy things a lot. But just because it’s crazy doesn’t mean it’s good. And how are we to determine if it’s crazy good or crazy bad?

I think our gospel this morning gives us a way to look at that decision, a way to discern between crazy good and crazy bad.

Jesus is at it again. He has challenged folks on the rules of the Sabbath, walking through grain fields and plucking heads of grain, healing when he’s not supposed to be healing, and now the crowd has gathered. The scribes have come from Jerusalem and he is, in everybody’s view, crazy.

But is he crazy good or is he crazy bad?

The scribes have made up their mind. They decide that while he has power, it is an evil power. It is from Beelzebub. It is from Satan. He is to be feared because, of course, he is challenging the structures that provide control and ensure purity—

things that these well-educated people think are very important.

He's crazy bad. His family reaches a similar conclusion. They, when they hear what people are saying, go back and attempt to see him. Our translation says they went to restrain him because people were saying he was out of his mind. A more contemporary translation says they went to set him right because he was crazy.

And, of course, their concern is fear. They are part of the elaborate kinship system. Their personalities, their upbringing, their economic and political and social opportunities are all premised on their family. So Jesus getting himself caught up with the authorities is not only bad for him, but bad for them.

So, what do we learn about crazy good and crazy bad? I think we learned that crazy bad often comes from fear. It's a matter of what you see.

When you see the power that has control over you and you fear it, acts challenging that power are going to be crazy bad, and your defenses will often result in shrinking you and your project, in limiting what can be done, in dividing people into groups, because evil is what you see.

But crazy good... crazy good looks more like that 11-year-old and because we know about the cross, we can see it in Jesus' challenge. Crazy good is about seeing opportunities, focusing on the good, expanding, growing, uniting. You can distinguish, I think, between crazy good and crazy bad by the fruits that the project offers.

That 11-year-old I told you about was actually Meghan Markel, whom you now know as the Duchess of Sussex, and some of you may have actually seen her wedding recently—I know I did at six o'clock on Saturday morning—to Prince Harry, and with all the royalty and all the pomp and all the circumstance of a royal wedding.

Now my wife and I got up on that Saturday morning and I was ready for entertainment, but I was not prepared to be taken to church. But that's what happened. For you see, amidst all of the concerns of the length of her veil and who was sitting where in the cast of suits was our own presiding bishop, Michael Curry.

And Michael Curry did something amazing. You could see it in part in what he said. He started off with Martin Luther King and he went on to de Chardin, a wonderful Jesuit scientist and theologian. He stopped along the way to talk about a balm in Gilead and to quote Amos and to sing old spirituals. He targeted this love between Harry and Meghan and drew it out to get us all to imagine what a society of love might look like. It was stunning and unprecedented.

But I think there was more—something more important. It was crazy, but it was crazy good.

Because, you see, what Michael did, in the midst of all of this expectation was to be himself. He went to England, he stood in that chapel, and he was himself. You could kind of see this coming. In an interview before the service, someone from the BBC asked him, "Are you nervous? Are you anxious?"

And he said, "Well, yeah, I am but you know the Episcopal Church is part of the Anglican Communion." And then he leaned forward and he said, "So it's always good to be in Mama's house."

You got a sense then that this was going to be different. And as he stood behind that podium and he took his five minutes of allotted time and expanded them into 15, which any good preacher does, what you got a sense of was Michael Curry being fully alive. And that's crazy good.

But it comes out of a sense of hope and confidence that faith alone, I think, can bring.

Well, you see, it wasn't about what Michael said specifically. It wasn't the light that he himself generated. It was his presence, his being there. He was loving them and they were loving each other, and you could see it on their faces and you could see it in his eyes. There he was with cameras, which I'm told included the eyes of 1.9 billion people, and he's looking at them as they hold hands and Prince Harry smiles.

Now, not everybody thought this was so wonderful. If you looked at Prince William, it wasn't clear he was having such a good time. But what it did is show us all what crazy good looks like and feels like, and as a result the internet blew up.

My favorite quote actually came from a post on a Facebook page where somebody had put forth Curry's sermon. And the

post said, “I believe that organized religion is the vilest of all evils. But I want to join this man’s cult!”

There’s something about crazy good that brings us in, that opens us up, that gives us the courage and confidence and creativity to do something new. Sometimes it’s a challenge to systems of power. Sometimes it’s being nice and loving to someone we don’t know. But it often involves standing up when others sit down, or speaking out when others are quiet, or putting yourself in a place where your own family thinks you’ve lost your mind.

Crazy good often leads you into those places, but if you go read that sermon and you see Michael Curry’s face and your heart doesn’t grow, watch it again. Because he was crazy good.

Amen.