

Crazy Christians – A Call to Follow Jesus

In his book „Crazy Christians“ Michael B. Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America describes how in the 1990s he first met the author of a book called “The Dream of God: A Call to Return”.

Meeting this woman, Verna Dozier, helped him see that the Bible and indeed our Christian faith and tradition are pointing far beyond themselves to the will, the vision and the passionate desire of God. Verna and later many others started using the expression of God’s dream, an expression full of beauty and poetry. I first read it in Desmond Tutu’s books. And I loved and love it! “God’s dream” almost becomes a substitute for God’s kingdom...

Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God probably more than about anything else. He talks about the realization of God’s dream and vision for human life, human society and all of creation.

The dream of God is, in part, the motive for God’s involvement and God’s mission in the life of the world, from the days of the Bible until now. That dream, so Michael Curry says, is the reason why God came among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And Jesus showed us the way to live beyond what often are the nightmares of a sin-filled world...

Jesus invites us into the direction of God’s dream...

What wonderful theological language...

It makes me want to know more about it, read more, think more, write more...

“Being a Christian is not essentially about joining a church or being a nice person. Being a Christian is about following in the footsteps of Jesus, taking his teaching seriously, letting his spirit take the lead in our lives. And in doing so helping to change the world from our nightmare into God’s dream”, writes Curry after he’d read Verna Dozier’s publications.

He adds a Robert Kennedy quote:

“Some men (well yes, he says “men” – but that was before we began thinking about inclusive language) see things as they are and ask why. I dream things that never were and ask why not.” A beautiful invitation to go beyond what everybody thinks is possible and dream of something greater.

And then let’s have a look at our world – with this Kennedy quote on our minds...

Why not?

Why not a world where no child will ever go to bed hungry again?

Why not a world in which poverty is truly history, a thing of the past?
Why not a world in which every person is treated and valued as a child of God?
Why not a world where we lay down our swords and shields and study war no more?
Why not a world reconciled to our God and to each other as children of God and brothers and sisters of one another?
Why not a world that looks less like the mess we have now and more like the dream of God's creating?
Why not?

We, who want to be disciples of Jesus, are people who have made a commitment or are constantly making one: we commit to follow Jesus' teachings, his manner of life, and the loving and liberating power of his spirit. We commit to follow or believe in God's great "Why not?" We commit to help God's dream come true...

"Am I daily becoming a more loving person?" asked St Benedict 500 yrs after Jesus' death, and invited people to live with this question on a daily basis. Maybe today we could add to it: Am I daily helping the small part of the world in which I live to look a bit more like the world God is dreaming of?

Do I dare to become a Crazy Christian? ...as Bishop Curry calls those people who try to live a counter-cultural life of real Christian discipleship. Do we understand and share the so much needed message of hope for a new and transformed creation?
If yes, we must be as crazy as the man we follow.

And honestly: in Jesus' days people did think he was crazy. Just imagine what Jesus was getting as responses when he said: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it". (Mark 8:34-35)

Or let us look at Mark 3: 19-21, when we can read the words "He has gone out of his mind." That is what people said. Or: "He is beside himself." Or: "When Jesus' family heard what he was doing, they thought he was crazy and went to get him under control."

Trying to get Jesus "under control" is exactly the problem. How could one?
Tame Jesus? Manage him? Put him in a box?

And he?

He goes on breaking out of all tombs into which we have put him...

If we can take the word “crazy” as something very positive, something adventurous and passionate, something deeply loving and always surprising, it is worth calling Jesus crazy. Jesus beyond all measures, Jesus wider and higher than we can think, Jesus asking us to come out of our small lives and to live up to something greater... Jesus challenging us and filling our lives with more love, more peace, more grace than we could have ever imagined...

Would we then want to be his followers and be called “Crazy Christians”?

Let’s go back to that line, “When Jesus’ family heard what he was doing, they thought he was crazy and went to get him under control.”

I don’t want to be too quick to judge Jesus’ mother and the whole family.

They had good reasons to be concerned.

There is this family member who says things like “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9).

That’s crazy!

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus says: “The greatest among you will be your servant” (Mt 23:11). That’s crazy!

What the world calls wretched, Jesus calls blessed.

Blessed are the poor and the poor in spirit.

Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the compassionate.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst that God’s righteous justice may prevail.

Blessed are those who work for peace.

Blessed are you when you are persecuted just for trying to love and do what is good (Mt 5:3-11).

Jesus said all that in the Sermon on the Mount, - to crowds of people.

That was crazy.

Jesus said: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5:44).

Jesus was crazy.

He prayed while he was killed “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34).

Now **that** is crazy...

It is this kind of craziness Bishop Curry is talking and writing about.
And he clearly states that what the church needs, what the world needs, are
some Christians who are as crazy as the Lord.
Crazy enough to love like Jesus.
Crazy enough to give like Jesus.
...to forgive like Jesus,
to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God – like Jesus.
Crazy enough to dare to change the world from the mess it often is into
something closer to the dream that God dreams for the world... the dream
God dreams for us... for us, who would follow Jesus, who would be his
disciples, who would live as the people of the “Way” – Jesus’ way...
“It might,” writes Bishop Curry “come as a shock, but those of us called to
that life are called to craziness, too.

And then he encourages us to find New Testament people as examples of
such craziness. And who came to my mind first, is Mary. Mary Magdalene.
(Luke 8:1-3)

Let us take Mary as a significant example of what it means to follow Jesus, to
be his disciple, to be a person of the Jesus movement.

Mary followed Jesus because she was crazy – before she first met him, and
afterwards too.

Mary was a woman with problems.

She was a woman alone in a world of men.

She made her own living and stood her own ground.

She had money, but she was lonely.

She was isolated from others, because of some kind of illness.

She may have been in pain, suffering from grief and loss.

She may have been fearful and shy...

These may have been the demons she supposedly had...

Mary certainly had problems. And Jesus healed her.

Mary was not mad.

She just led a very different life in a world dominated by men.

She shows up when she’s not supposed to.

She speaks up when others shut up.

She stands up when everybody else sits down.

People thought she was crazy.

And in a way she was... she was unusual and counter-cultural enough to
follow Jesus.

Just remember Jesus' crucifixion. Crucifixion was the punishment by the Empire for crimes against the state. It was public torture. It was an intentionally brutal means of capital punishment, an execution meant to send a message that revolution and revolutionaries would not be tolerated. If you were a supporter or follower of the person being crucified, it was dangerous to stand too close by during the execution. The rational and sensible thing to do was to go into hiding or even exile. It was utterly and thoroughly dangerous for Mary to be present at Jesus' crucifixion, so very near his cross. he risked her life. She was there, when they crucified her Lord... That's crazy...

But that's not all. On that Easter morning, who gets up and goes to the tomb of Jesus? Mary and some sisters. And it didn't make sense. It was dangerous to be so closely associated with a person just executed by the Empire. Going to Jesus' tomb made absolutely no sense. It's just plain crazy.

The gospels say there was a large stone rolled in front of the tomb. Presumably Mary knew about it. She had no plan and no way to move that stone. But she went to the grave anyway. That's crazy. And that craziness led her to being the first witness to the fact that the love of God is greater than any hatred humans can inflict. Mary was crazy like Christ; she was Christ's witness to the world. She shows us the way. She shows us what we need: some crazy Christians.

People who stand up, march, speak against the status quo and make a difference for the kingdom of God.
People who are crazy enough to think they can change the world.
People who carry the gospel, the stories of Jesus, the way of Jesus into the nightmare of a world of conflict and greed.
People who are crazy enough to believe that God is real and that Jesus lives.
People who are crazy enough to believe that the love of God is greater than all the powers of evil and death.
...crazy enough to hold onto justice, 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 because we are all created in the image of God and are meant to be treated as such.

Our world today, sisters and brothers,
needs people who are crazy enough to catch a glimpse of the crazy,
transforming, life-changing vision of our Lord Jesus.
And then we can't help but do the work of God
who wants us to help him realize his dream for all people and all creation.
Amen.