



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

JUNE 10, 2018  
THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## Deflect or Reflect II Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

“I like rumors,” said some unknown sage. “I find out so much about myself that I did not know.” Apparently, Jesus learned a lot about himself as he traveled throughout Galilee. His fame spread, but so did the rumors. On one occasion, he asked his disciples what people were saying about him. They answered that some people thought he was “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets” (Mark 8:27-29)—basically positive and hopeful ideas. There was nothing wrong in being compared to those three stalwarts of the faith.

Other rumors, however, were your typical street variety which tended to create doubt, suspicion, and opposition, like the ones in the passage we just read. Mark captured the spirit of these rumors when he wrote, “. . . people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’” It did not take long for such comments to reach Jerusalem where the religious leaders devoured them like a decadent dessert. In no time at all, scribes had made the long and treacherous journey to Galilee where they put their own devious spin on the rumors: “He has Beelzebul,” they whispered, “and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” Journalist Shana Alexander once observed, “Trying to squash a rumor is like trying to unring a bell.” I guess as Jesus moved from one village to the next, the bells were ringing loud and clear.

In fact, these rumors were so potent and abundant that Jesus’ own family was worried about his state of mind. They tracked him down and begged him to come with them, intending to restrain him! When rumors start worrying your family, you truly have something to worry about!

For most people, Jesus was a phenomenon. Crowds thronged to see him. They were astounded by his teaching and his understanding of God’s concern for them. They were amazed by his ability to heal and brought their sick family members to him. They carried friends who were crippled or had any number of disabilities. They were touched by his openness. People who were beyond the margins of society, who had been written off by the community and excluded from everything, felt welcomed and accepted by this

man. And, sure enough, some folks showed up with strange afflictions and Jesus cast out their demons.

I don't pretend to understand the whole "demons" thing in the Bible. Obviously, there were physical and mental illnesses at the time that were not well understood so the assumption was made that a person was "possessed." Witnessing an epileptic seizure was (and is) a frightening experience. Not understanding the medical causes of a seizure, ancient people assumed an evil spirit had taken possession of that person. A host of mental illnesses that today can be treated and controlled could cause a first century person to do bizarre things. "Demons!" the people around him would shout as he was banished from the community. You can understand why Jesus' fame spread when he was able to cure such illnesses. Whatever it was that Jesus did to bring about a cure, don't you think the people and their families and friends were delighted? I suspect they might even had said they were "beside themselves with joy!"—a term we use to suggest extreme happiness but which also suggests a duality of nature, itself perhaps considered a demonic state.

Why weren't the scribes and some of the other people also delighted by what Jesus was doing? Why were they spreading vicious, vindictive, even slanderous rumors about him? They went so far as to suggest that Jesus himself was possessed by none other than Beelzebul—Satan—who provided Jesus with the power to cast out the demons he himself had sent to torture unfortunate souls. Why did his own family believe these rumors might be true?

Jesus was a threat to power. He challenged the status quo. He threatened the notion that God was up in heaven somewhere and perhaps manipulated what happened on earth but was not intimately involved. Jesus challenged the notion that there were people who were "in" and some who were "out" as far as God is concerned. He threatened the influence of the priests and scribes and Pharisees who used their religious positions to harass and take advantage of the populace. He challenged the ways in which particular communities treated one another. He still does so today.

Jeanne Choy Tate suggests that in this story which Mark tells with such up-to-date clarity, the scribes and crowd and even Jesus' family are on the outside of his house demanding that he come out and come clean while Jesus is inside the house with a group of people who are normally considered

“outsiders.”<sup>1</sup> That is why when he is told that his mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for him, he replies, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” He looks at the people sitting in his home—people who suffer from all sorts of problems from seizures and withdrawals to addictions and poverty, from moral failures and ethical misbehavior to contagious diseases and unpopular ideas—and he feels an uncommon kinship with them. They could have easily formed a chorus to sing the words we heard earlier:

At the land’s dark roots, in the farthest deep,  
where the daylight dims, where no one can reach,  
can the hand of God, can the voice of love  
find me even here?

I have turned away, I have set my fate,  
I have run too far, I repent too late,  
can the hand of God, can the voice of love  
find me even here?<sup>2</sup>

He hears their song and he calls outside and says, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Do not be distressed by his startling response because it is not a slap in the face to his mother and siblings. It is instead a profound confession about his true family of origin—our true family of origin. Because he is the Son of God and the Son of Man, Jesus has turned social and religious convention inside out so that the outs are in and the ins are out.

That does seem crazy, doesn’t it?

We have made great strides in understanding some of the neurological illnesses that are devastating to our mind and bodies, but there are still people who look down upon, ridicule, label, and ostracize others because of conditions that are beyond their control. We are still prone to spread rumors and lies about people we do not really know rather than take the time and effort to discover who they really are. As numerous preachers and pundits

---

<sup>1</sup>Jeanne Choy Tate, “Living the Word: Reflections on the Lectionary, Mark 3:20-35,” *The Christian Century* ( May 23, 2018), 22.

<sup>2</sup>Laurie Zelman, “Even Here,” Hinshaw Music, Inc., © copyright 2014.

have observed, "A lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth can get its boots on."<sup>3</sup>

Here is what happened: the scribes, supported by the Pharisees and priests, were threatened by Jesus and the Gospel. Some of the people, in towns large and small, were threatened by changes in attitude and action they heard Jesus demanding. Fearing that his so-called miracles might sway the masses to follow him, they had to find some way to deflect the truth of his message. Doubt and suspicion usually work well, so they planted the notion that his power over demons came from the ruler of the demons themselves. They whispered the rumors that Jesus was unstable, a hoax, a con man, and downright crazy. They deflected the truth instead of reflecting the Gospel.

Was Jesus crazy? Was he possessed by demons? Was everything that he taught us about God's redemptive love and how we should treat other people suspect? Or did he reflect the true love of God by welcoming all people regardless of their problems? Did he reflect the grace of God by urging everyone to repent and turn from evil? Did he reflect the Gospel in exposing the dark side of our attitudes and the insecurities of our fears?

"I have in my hand a crisp, new one hundred dollar bill? Who would like to have this crisp, new one hundred dollar bill?"

I wonder if I crumple up this one hundred dollar bill, if anyone will still want it. "Who still wants it?"

"Well, what if I drop the money on the floor and grind it with my shoe? "Who still wants it?"

Obviously, we all know something important that is true. No matter what is done to the money, it is still wanted because it does not decrease in value. This bill, now crumpled and dirty, is still worth one hundred dollars.

As so often happens to many of us and other people, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the choices we make, by circumstances beyond our control, and by situations that come our way. Because of these

---

<sup>3</sup>Garson O'Toole, "A Lie Can Travel Halfway Around the World While the Truth Is Putting On Its Shoes," *Quote Investigator*® (July 13, 2014); available online at: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/07/13/truth/>. The article discusses the origin of this phrase often attributed to Mark Twain and other people.

kinds of things, we may feel as though we are worthless and useless and unwanted.

The truth—the message—of the Gospel which Jesus came to proclaim and live is that no matter what has happened to you or anyone else or will happen to you or anyone else, neither you nor they will ever lose value in the sight of God. Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, we are all priceless to God and the people who truly love us.<sup>4</sup>

That sounds crazy, I know. It sounds crazy now. It sounded crazy in the first century. Jesus, however, staked his life on its being true—and so can we. Perhaps Jesus was “out of his mind” and acting purely from his heart. I happen to think they work in tandem. If so, all we have to ask ourselves is, “Do we deflect or reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ?” Do we live in such a way that we turn the tables on injustice and abuse? Do we welcome the so-called outsiders to come inside with us? Do we remind anyone who would exclude someone who does not “fit” their image of perfection that their attitude places them on the outside? Rumor has it that Jesus is crazy—crazy in love with those of us he call his sisters and brothers—who just happen to be all of us. May we, in this crazy world in which we live, find ways to reflect the love of God in fresh and authentic ways. Amen.

---

<sup>4</sup>This illustration is borrowed from a familiar story often told about a popular speaker who uses a \$20 bill to make the simple point that we all have intrinsic value no matter what happens to us.

June 10, 2018

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We gather in this place week by week seeking your presence, O Lord, and often searching for answers, for community, for comfort, and for peace. We are called to a life of faith and discipleship, but sometimes your call demands more than we bargained for. The world would measure success and happiness by quantity: what is the biggest, the most, the best; and convince us that our worth is to be found in what we can achieve and how much we can acquire. But Christ has called us as his followers to life in a kingdom that is like a hidden treasure, whose economy is measured by obedience and joy and compassion. Where the world tells us to do whatever we must to remain in control and get ahead, Jesus teaches that the last will be first, that the greatest faith grows from the tiniest of seeds, that true power is found in vulnerability, and that those willing to give the most will, in turn, gain the whole world. O God, grant us the grace to hear your call above the flattery and deception of other messages that beckon to us, and give us the courage to follow you instead of chasing after attractions and accolades that are temporary. Make us attentive to the sound of your voice. Grant us wisdom to discern your truth. Give us endurance and creativity to work toward the vision of your kingdom.

We have only to look around us, O Lord, throughout this community and around our world, to see the needs that surround and sometimes overwhelm us. Images on the news are stark reminders of places where violence and corruption and oppression threaten to rob your children of life and security and freedom. We pray that you would make of us messengers of your peace. Even in our land where opportunities are available and resources are abundant, there are dark corners where poverty and hopelessness seem to reign. We pray that you would grant us generous and compassionate hearts in the face of such need. Among our own number there are many who are plagued by illness, crippled by grief or haunted by fear. We pray that you would empower us to bring healing and offer comfort. Within our own circle of friends and family, there are needs of body, mind, and spirit which we want to meet but which leave us feeling depleted and helpless. We pray that you would enable us to offer words of hope and to share your love and mercy in ways that will bring assurance to these for whom we pray that they are not alone in their struggle. Grant to each of us, O Lord, grace for this day and hope for all our days to come. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and by the power of your Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Elizabeth J. Edwards  
Associate Minister