

## Looking for Crazy Christians

The Rev. Mark D. Wilkinson  
St. Aidan's Episcopal Church  
Virginia Beach VA 23452  
[www.aidanvba.net](http://www.aidanvba.net)

Today's gospel is a challenging one on which to preach. What possible good news is there contained in the bloody story of the execution of John the Baptist. I found that N. T. Wright in his book *Simply Jesus* has a wonderful insight into this passage and does illustrate how important it is for us today.

In Chapter 4 Bishop Wright takes on the complex political, religious and social world of the time when John loses his head. He talks about the events being a perfect storm and we see this storm begin to break in our gospel passage. He uses the analogy of the perfect storm off of New England several years ago that was made into a movie of that name. Three different storm fronts came together at a specific place at a specific time to form a huge storm. In the time of Jesus three different events all came together in a specific place all at the same time and changed the world.

The first storm front is that of Jewish tradition and the state of the temple at the time of Jesus. Just a few weeks ago we heard of David being anointed by Samuel as the king to replace Saul. Then we heard the story of David and Goliath, which is really a story that said, YHWH was their God and protected them. The David and Goliath story is about YHWH defeating the Philistines, not David. David is the anointed one who does God's work. Then when Saul is killed in battle, David steps up and takes over. Now as a sign of his power David decides to bring the ark to Jerusalem, his new capital. The ark, which went into battle was where God lived and spoke to the Israelites from is to be brought to the new capital as a sign that God is with them. This was a god in a box that grants power to the one who possesses the box as long as it is the right person. Think about that for a moment. Think about the image of God that this creates. God is god, not of the world but of the Israelites. God can be possessed and possess a specific group.

David's son Solomon builds the first temple and the ark is placed in the holy of holies. This is the place where the priests must go to speak to God and to hear his word. The temple stands until Israel is unfaithful and the temple is destroyed. The ark then disappears from history. Eventually the temple is rebuilt, but without the ark. So for the rest of the time between the restoration of Jerusalem to the time of the Herodian dynasty, the Jews are looking for God to return to the temple. They have been freed from Babylonian captivity, but now are enslaved by the next storm front in the perfect storm. Their second exodus is not yet over and they are waiting for a messiah to arrive as promised in the words of the prophets.

That second storm front is Rome. Rome has not been in power a long time in historical terms, but now dominates this area of the world. The population of Rome is large, far larger than the area can support in terms of food. The piece of the puzzle that N.T.

Wright provides is that Rome was as dependent on the middle east for one essential commodity as we are dependent on them for oil. The commodity is wheat and grain. Egypt and the surrounding area is the bread basket of the empire and a secure sea and land route for that grain was essential. So Rome has a vital supply link that runs right through the area. Peace is vital for commerce and Jerusalem and the nation of Israel sit astride that route. Rome has no great interest except to keep things quiet and collect their taxes while they continue to expand their empire.

Then there is the third storm front, the wind of God as manifested in Jesus his son. Jesus and his followers are inserted into this tense situation and provide a solution to the coming of the kingdom that is neither expected nor really desired by the powers that be. Herod a weak puppet of the Roman's certainly is not interested in a new king. He is king and really prefers to stay king. He does everything he can to keep that job and John is simply in the way by raising an objection to legitimacy of his rule.

The Jewish leadership is trying to keep control and hopes for the messiah that will free them from Rome. That is their goal and it is centered around just the Jewish world. They were not worried about anybody else. However that is not Jesus' or God's agenda.

God is not looking to save just the Israelites, but to save all of humanity. God is looking to bring the kingdom into reality for everybody, Jew Gentile, man, woman, slave or free. Jesus is the answer that God gives to the world of how and when the kingdom will come. The world was not ready to hear this.

I suspect we have something of this perfect storm right now in the world today with the clash of religions of all sorts and popular culture. The infusion of a conservative brand of several religions into politics and power structures around the world and the reality of a post-Christian world in much of the west presents the perfect storm of our day. So what are we to do?

This is where I believe history was made at our General Convention. I am referring to the person whom we elected as our next presiding bishop, The Rt. Rev. Michael Curry. Never before has a presiding bishop been elected on the first ballot by such a huge margin Our bishop described the election as follows: "*Never before has the House of Bishops spoken so clearly and so single mindedly about the leadership it desires for the future of our Church.*" So what type of leader is Bishop Curry in this time of a perfect storm for our church?

I go back to a sermon that became a book. You can watch the sermon where Michael says, "What we need is some crazy Christians."<sup>1</sup> I think many at the time would have agreed that both John the Baptist and Jesus were at least a little crazy. Remember they both paid with their lives for standing up to power and calling it corrupt. That's crazy most people would say. Jesus' family says as much at one point where he is teaching and they try to stop him. (Mark 3: 19-25).

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abJMKeyCWoQ>

Michael's message is that we have too long tried to keep Jesus under control. His call is for all of us to be as crazy as Jesus and John the Baptist. His call is that we need crazy Christians in order to make a difference in this world. He calls us to repay evil with a blessing and to love our neighbor regardless of who that neighbor is. We must love our enemy. For most people that is crazy.

In his book Bishop Curry quotes *"Daniel Erlander, (who) spent some time combing through the gospels to make a list of the types of people Jesus encountered: lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners, poor people, discarded people, blind people, debtors, outcasts, children, women, men, elderly people, sick people, Gentiles, Samaritans, Jews, the demon-possessed, outsiders, heretics, Pharisees, lawyers, rich people. Erlander then made a list of the verbs the gospels used to describe how Jesus related to these people: "invited," "included," "affirmed," "loved," "touched," "liberated," "held," "embraced," "healed," "cleansed," "given dignity," "fed," "forgiven," "made whole," "called," "reborn," "given hope," "received," "honored," "freed."*

His call to the church is to go out and be crazy enough to stand up to those forces that stand in the way of the kingdom and to be an open and inviting church to everyone. Michael is looking for a church that is willing to do all those actions I just read. Michael is looking for a church, a crazy church one that is willing to make a difference in this broken world.

Stop and think about that blessing I read at the end of every service. I say the words and many people say how much you like it, but are you willing to really pray that all those things happen to you? For if you do, you are asking to be blessed with some serious craziness because each blessing comes with a call to be changed by God.

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Maybe that last line should read, May God bless you with the craziness to believe that you can make a difference. This is not a call to simply be aware, but to do something. For this is the kind of crazy Christian our new Presiding Bishop is calling us all to be. So buckle up and hold on this is going to be quite a ride.

