

“House of Weird” a sermon based on 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1 and Mark 3:19b-35 preached on the Second Sunday of Pentecost, 7 June 2015, at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright.

So Jesus went home (Mark 3:19b). Perhaps he imagined he would be welcomed and supported and encouraged and heartened.

Sorry.

His family thought he had gone out of his mind. The Greek literally means, he had left the house. To use a colloquialism, there was no one home. They thought he was mentally unwell.

The scribes though, they did not think he was mentally unwell. They thought he had been taken over by the Strong Man, the Devil, that he was possessed. Beelzebul means – ruler of the house. They thought the Strong Man ruled the house of Jesus.

So his family thought no one was home. And the scribes thought the home was occupied by the Strong Man.

What does it say to us, that the one we seek to follow was regarded as mad by his family and by the religious authorities of the day as possessed?

Now you could easily dismiss both, his family like his disciples never quite grasped who he was. That is a theme in the Gospel of Mark. And the scribes, well, they were so caught up with maintaining the religious system they could not see a genuinely holy man.

Perhaps. Clearly his family were concerned for him and clearly the scribes were thoughtful religious leaders. Neither were obviously evil.

I sense we need to come to terms with the weirdness of Jesus and the weirdness of our faith.

I was brought up believing enthusiastic religious people were weird. Religion just did not fit our world-view. I could show you the houses in which lived people who were enthusiastic about their faith - because they were seen as weird. I sense that is still so for many parts of New Zealand.

The world has changed from the time this Church was built.

Accepting weirdness saves us from wasting energy.

We don't need to show how acceptable faith is to the most respectable citizens of our city. We don't need to prove we are respectable or mainstream or even normal. Indeed, there is a danger in doing so. The more mainstream we become, the more establishment we are,

the more accepted we are, the greater is the temptation to be constrained by what others think and say and do.

I have quoted before the President of the Uniting Church in Australia saying: “Act as if no one is watching.”

We also don't need to waste energy on wondering what people will make of what we do. Let's not get worried by what our friends and family make of our faith or the stand we take or the views we express. Let's not be concerned if people oppose what we do and say.

If we are weird, we are weird. That's it.

Of course, it's hard, because we love our families and we like our friends, and we rely on them and we need them and we want to be in relationship with them.

I did not tell my parents I was being baptised because of how I imagined they would respond – I respected their judgement. I did not tell the judge before whom I used to appear I was training to be a minister because of how I imagined he would respond – I respected his judgement.

If only I had learned to accept weirdness, to accept that there is an inherent uneasiness about being a follower, that we are never entirely comfortable, at ease. We never quite fit in.

Jesus did not set out to be weird. It's not weirdness for the sake of weirdness.

He had a vision at odds with the ruling vision. He had a commitment at odds with the ruling authorities.

He touched lepers, befriended prostitutes, claimed to go beyond the law of Moses, asked us to forgive our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, refused to take up arms to defend himself, told a rich man to give all his wealth away.

So people gathered around him out of the mainstream of society. What got him into most trouble was the company he kept – here are my mother and my brothers, he said.

Robin Meyers is minister of a United Church of Christ congregation in Oklahoma. In speaking of the Church he highlights “our peculiar witness to the upside-down instructions left to us by a God-intoxicated misfit. Christians can survive almost anything, save the loss of distinctiveness ... While we coddle the industries that ravage the earth for energy and then market death to us disguised as comfort, the conscience of the faithful has been euthanized by public relations campaigns ...” of large corporations. “Where are the holy fools for God today? Who stands out in the crowd as a troublemaker for justice? Where can we find the spiritual contrarian ...?”

A person whose writing and speaking I follow is Nadia Bolz-Weber, a minister of the Lutheran Church in the United States.

Nadia helped establish a Church in Denver Colorado called the House for All Sinners and Saints: “a group of folks figuring out how to be liturgical, Christo-centric, social justice-oriented, queer-inclusive, incarnational, contemplative, irreverent, ancient/future church with a progressive but deeply rooted theological imagination.”

The congregation began with people on the edge of society. They were shocked when “normal” people started turning up. They had to have a church meeting about it, whether these “normal” people should be welcomed.

It’s not weird for weird’s sake.

It’s faithfulness to a distinct vision that puts us at odds with prevailing paradigms.

And its commitment to the wellbeing of people at the edge of society, with whom we are called to gather.

One of our Moderators, Duncan Jamieson, used to say the gospel could be summarised in three words – God loves ratbags. And in five words, God loves ratbags like me. Exactly! Ratbags we are!

He gathers us around him, ratbags, sinners and saints, fools for Christ.

Sigmund Freud said that the bold people were those who knew they were loved.

That’s it!

God’s extravagant love has wooed us, persuaded us that there are no boundaries on love, on God’s love, and indeed, that at the edge is where love takes shape.

That’s where God puts us, at the edge, on the margin, no longer mainstream.

“Here are our mothers and brothers.”

The house of God - the people of God – house of weird.