

Text: *Psalms* 8:5 What is man that you should be mindful of him?

### **Have a Crazy New Year: Living in the Jesus Asylum**

Repeating the same failed behavior and expecting different results is a good definition of crazy.

For my own psychological health, I insist that you do not have to be crazy to be religious. However, some people are religious crazy all of the time and all of us are religious crazy some of the time. Religious craziness is evident in three different parts of our religious lives: In belief, in prayer and in obedience.

When **belief** is a substitute for thinking we are being religious-crazy. When I was a child, I didn't think of the stories of the Old Testament as the efforts of a primitive people to understand their place in the universe. I swallowed the stories as historical fact – hook, line and sinker! When I rejected the historical veracity of those stories I rejected much of the rest of the Old and New Testaments. It was not until I started thinking, reading philosophy, reading about the meaning contained in myths that I regained my faith.

If our beliefs are worth preserving, they are worth thinking about. The former Bishop of the Diocese of West Texas, Gary Lillibridge, used to often speak of the necessity of critical Bible study. Critical does not mean negative, it means thinking in an investigative way. I used to really dislike a number of Paul's letters until I finally understood that critical analysis clearly showed that Paul's views of secular authority were not his, but were added during the reign of Constantine. Belief is a call to thinking, not a prohibition or impediment to thinking.

When **prayer** is a substitute for action, we are being religious-crazy. If I pray for peace, but have not made peace with my family or neighbor I am not just a hypocrite, but I am religious-crazy as well. Praying for peace, but rewarding war behavior much more than we reward peace behavior is also being religious-crazy. I pray for an end to violence, but I take no action to end it, just as I always precede eating too much by praying for those in need.

Prayer is an important part of our religious experience, but we should heed St. James when he says "For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?" [James 2:15-17] It is also being religious-crazy.

When **obedience** is a substitute for problem-solving, we are being religious-crazy. It is pretty obvious that all of us must be obedient to the Gospels, but after that the question of obedience becomes much more problematic. When the institutional church, or even individual church members, show the signs of tribalism or one of the other ailments of modern America, do we dismiss the problem by saying "that one is above my pay grade." Another, more Southern U.S. approach would be to say "I don't have a dog in that fight." We await instructions addressed as specifically as possible to us individually, and then we obey. Obedience has taken the place of our active participation in solving the problem.

As members of a parish, we need to be involved in solving the problems we see around us. If we are successful, they may never become problems that the institutional church must deal with. If we are religious-crazy, we will say "that's the bishop's problem" or "let's wait and see what the bishop has to

say.” As members of the Episcopal church it is well to obey our bishops, but it is even better to solve problems on our own, at the level of the local parish.

Enough about our craziness. What happens when we live in the Jesus asylum? Do you remember Dante’s sign on the portals of Hell? Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here. Well, the portal to the Jesus Asylum reads Find Hope All Ye Who Enter Here. Some of us have been taught that what we really need is Jesus within us. Evangelists and song writers are fond of saying “let Jesus into your heart!” Many of us who have followed that dictum found a place for Jesus in our heart: To be precise, in the lower left ventricle, between tree hugger and do gooder. That seems to be a good place to keep Jesus. He is in good company and only needs to be brought out on appropriate occasions.

One can’t help but think, maybe we have it backwards. We don’t let Jesus in, we go into Jesus. The Jesus Asylum is actually life in the Holy Spirit. By the grace of God,

we can take our crazy selves into the Asylum. Even with a burden of sin, we are so nearly perfect that we are worth redeeming – crazy bits and all. We don’t rely on the Holy Spirit to solve our problems. We rely on the Spirit to give us the strength and will to use our brains and bodies in a manner befitting a Jesus inmate.

So, welcome 2023! Yes Lord, we are all crazy and do and believe in crazy things. Give us Asylum Jesus so that we might transform that craziness into life affirming works that rescue humankind and glorify You. Amen.