

Followers of Jesus are called to be weird

Mk 6:34-44; Micah 6:6-8; Ps 121; Jam 2:14-26

We are so familiar with the Bible stories and theology that we just accept them as normal. But when we think about it – they are so simply weird. The word weird means extraordinary, abnormal, strange, unnatural, supernatural, unusual, unearthly, mysterious, magical, and otherworldly. So to put it simply, followers of Jesus are just weird, when you think about it.

There is a book by Michael Frost titled: *Keep Christianity Weird: Embracing the Discipline of Being Different*. The book review says this:

Jesus is different. Go & do likewise. But many Christians have become comfortable letting the world mold them instead of being set apart by God. Many churches have traded in their biblical roots for complacent conventionality. But Jesus and the church are anything but conventional. Our faith is that it sees the world differently than the world sees itself.

We are called to be eccentric - off center, unique, different; not conformed to the patterns of the culture but transformed by the renewing of our minds. By the grace of God we are not only dissatisfied by sin but increasingly uncompelled by conventionality. So resist the allure of acceptability and respectability. Get back to the unsafe roots of our faith. Be equipped to surprise the world with the Good News it didn't even know it was waiting for. Challenge the way things are by living a life that has been truly set free by Christ.

This book, along with the Bible and many other Christian helps, encourages us to be more weird. But take heart, we are in great company! Through out history God has raised up people to inspire and challenge the church from becoming molded in the image of the world around us. We are called to be unique, as individuals, and together as a body. Don't trade your God-given mandate to be different for comfortable conventionality.

We see some of this in our Scripture passages today. The feeding of the 5,000 – from five loaves of bread & 2 fish? Come on – get real!

Or these words from the prophet Micah. “Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” Who thinks and talks like that?

And what about the Psalm where we declare that God watches over us, never falls asleep so we don't get harmed. Really? Do we believe this? Looks like our God is often ineffective!

It does make sense to tie faith & deeds together, but Abraham is considered righteous because he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar? Rahab, a prostitute, is considered righteous & saved from death because of one good deed – and then became an ancestor of Jesus? This is weird stuff by any definition.

Greg Clark gives us 7 weird things followers of Jesus believe. One person's weird is another person's normal. Today it's possible, thanks to the internet, people tend not to get surprised much by weirdness. But Christians still come out on top for being weird. These ideas are not in dispute among Christians. They have been part of our view of the world since Jesus was a boy. If people **don't** believe these 7 things, it may be unfair to call them “Christians.”

One. We believe the best explanation for the universe's existence and qualities is a divine mind that we call God. We can't see this but we are confident in it, from the depths of our philosophy to the heights of our experience.

Two. We believe in the existence of non-human beings in another plane of reality but capable of being experienced in space and time. We call them angels, demons, Satan, heavenly creatures. We expect them to be active, even if we are not often aware of it. Probably most of our neighbours are believers in such beings.

Third. We believe that in different ways at different points in history, God has communicated with human beings. Sometimes it was through strange (“weird”!) activities such as a voice from the heavens, or even a speaking donkey, or writing on a wall. Today this has been clearly seen through the teachings and actions of Jesus Christ as found in the Bible. We’re not surprised by this, because we think it is a loving act of God to reach out to us.

Fourth. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth was fully human but also fully divine. Christ is considered God. Those who encountered him in the 30s AD believed they were in touch with the divine. That’s why we place incredible importance on his words as recorded in the Bible and the words of his followers. We are listening to God speak. We who aspire to be more holy, perfect, and pure, seek to follow the way of Jesus. We consider this our calling.

Fifth. We believe that those who lived after the time of Jesus can still encounter God through his Holy Spirit. Jesus taught that when he left the world to return to God in heaven, his Spirit remained – the spirit of God in Christ. God is active in the world right up to today because his Spirit is here. I know it sounds weird and, yes, it is. Real weird.

Sixth We believe that when Jesus was crucified (a common fate for non-conformists in the age of the Romans), his death was no mere physical matter. It was a spiritual means of reconciling a corrupted world, and all of its inhabitants, with divine perfection. It was a dramatic act with theological and eternal power. It resolved what C.S. Lewis called a “deep magic” by which justice and mercy, grace and truth, could be extended together. It’s why Easter is our big event. It’s at the core of our weirdness.

And seventh. We believe that eternity is real, space and time are limited, and the distance between the two is as small as the distance between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We believe Jesus returned to life after his burial and in doing so showed us what the future is

like. Death is not the end, its power is limited and the world will reach that limit one of these days. We think God has eternal plans for us and the world. The resurrection of Jesus is our big hint.

This is a key short list of what is normal for us weirdos as we believe in & follow Jesus. Over the years, many have been persecuted and even died for these weird beliefs. Our particular beliefs about the supernatural can make us outsiders. But are we more in touch with reality than the naysayers think? Followers of Jesus embrace the weird. Because we believe that only the weird can explain the supposedly normal. Without the supernatural and without Jesus, we are ignoring what’s real. We intend to stay weird, and keep talking about it with anyone who is happy to listen.

We live this by what we believe and by what we do. The key commandment in the Bible has dual requirements of us: It’s mentioned a number of times in the Old and New Testaments. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as your self.” (Mark 12:30) This sounds so familiar that it doesn’t sound weird. But it does when we look at how many people live. Today our focus is deepening our walk with Christ with our feet, hands, voices – our physical bodies – our might – our strength. This is the fourth in our series on Deepening our walk with Christ.

In practical terms it means we are to love God, 100%. To go all-out. To give it your best shot. If we fall down, to pick ourselves back up and keep going forward. To love Jesus with all our might means to love him “exceedingly, richly, lavishly, totally”, with reckless abandon out of simple devotion. We weirdly love our Creator with all our strength, with all our resources, our abilities and our time. We do this with our ears our hands, our eyes, our feet and our mouths.

So what does this look like? **First, we Love our Savior with what we find our hands to do.**

We are to serve the Lord diligently, being His hands extended in our world. We love Him by giving a cup of cold water to those in need. By feeding the poor. By laying hands on the sick. By lifting our hands in worship. By playing an instrument. By writing an article. By working with excellence. You could add to this list. The list can go on and on. Our hands serve a major purpose in loving God with all our strength.

Second, we Love our Redeemer with our eyes and what they see. The eyes are the gateway to the heart. We were made to gaze on God's beauty, to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter and finisher of our faith. Our eyes come in contact with so much during the day, and so much by choice that is not life giving. But we know we love Yahweh well when we see what pleases our Sustainer. We become what we behold.

A third way we Love God with our might is with ears to hear. Jesus said many times, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." Kind of a weird statement but a powerful one. What He is saying is listen to be transformed. Listen to be changed. Listen for more than information, listen to gain revelation. When we gain access to The Lamb's voice we are loving well. Listen to others share their story; hear their thoughts and hear their pain. Walk away from gossip, slander, backbiting, negative entertainment, lies, and discussions that put people down. These are all part of loving God with all our might – our ears.

Fourth, we Love our Creator with feet to go. Where our feet take us on the journey in life says a lot about how we love the Lord. Jesus laid it out when he said to "go and make disciples." The great commission is all about going. When we go and serve, go to church, go to a friend in need, go the extra mile, go to our work, we are loving God with all our strength. Be led by the Holy Spirit and let the Spirit lead you into amazing places and divine opportunities.

Fifth, we Love God with all our strength with our mouths to speak. May the words we say bring glory to the Lord. When we encourage, edify, comfort, honor, support, and bring life to others we create access for them to discover God's kindness. We love by declaring praise and worship to the Lord. Also, when we boldly share our faith with others and bring them into a relationship with God and when we instruct, coach, and counsel others, it all counts in loving the Lord with all our strength.

When we are walking with God we don't let other things distract us from Christ. We stop worrying about being weird. We know these things – but it's good to be reminded of them. Why? Because they are weird. In fact we know weirdness may be a clue we are doing God's bidding.

One stormy night, the missionary, Hudson Taylor was scheduled to speak in Birmingham, England, at the Severn Street schoolroom. His hostess attempted to dissuade him from going in the torrential downpour by telling him that every one would assume it was canceled. "But was it not announced for tonight?" Hudson Taylor asked. He then said, "I must go, even if there is no one but the doorkeeper."

The meeting was attended by less than a dozen people. But there was an unusual outpouring of the Holy Spirit's power. Half of those present either became missionaries or encouraged and freed their children to be missionaries. The other half became regular supporters of Mr. Hudson's mission.

Charles Spurgeon said, "Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without the wind, branches without sap, and like coals without fire, we are useless."

Throughout the Bible, our Creator tells us to be different. The Almighty calls us **not** to think the same, act the same, even dress or speak the same as the world. Scripture calls us "a chosen race, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." The King James version uses the

phrase “a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9). God doesn’t mince words. We are different, and we’re called to be that way. Followers of Jesus are weird. That’s a good thing.

What a privilege we have to love the Lord with all our might, with a reckless abandon expressed in a sold out life. The writer of Psalm 84:2 lays out his heart’s cry: “my heart and flesh cry out for the living God.” We’ve spent four Sundays focusing on God’s desire for us to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. With head, heart, spirit, and hands, feet, eyes and mouth.

Communion is a call to love our Savior well! It’s an act of commitment to give all our love to God! It’s an act of weirdness toward eternity.

Communion Words

As the deacons come forward – let’s take some time to prepare for taking communion.
(uncover elements)

Here are some words of Preparation.
Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we gather at this table today with servant spirits. At this table we remember Christ’s command to love God, with our whole selves; with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our strength, and with all our spirits, and *also* to love our neighbour.

As we take of the bread and cup, let us be reminded of our call from God to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.

At this table we remember our call. We pray that the bread and the cup that is shared will nourish us, today, tomorrow, and always for the many different ministries that we are called to.

(Invitation)

So come. _Come to the table of the Carpenter, who broke bread with calloused hands, knowing his body would be broken for us.

Come to the table of the Healer, who shared a cup with weathered hands, knowing his blood would be shed for us.

Come to the Lord’s Table, whether your hands are smooth or rough, polished or wrinkled, young or old.

Come, and receive in your hands the bread and the cup that are the gift of God’s everlasting covenant.

For the Bread - hand out.

Words of Institution

On the evening when Christ was betrayed, Jesus took the bread that was before him; Bread that was Milled, Kneaded, and Baked by ordinary Hands. He transformed it into a symbol by which we remember our calling by breaking it and saying: When you share this bread together, remember me.

Prayer of Thanksgiving
God of Love and Faithfulness, through this bread, we are drawn closer to you, and our calling to our neighbours.

Thank you for this bread,
Grown in the earth;
Prepared by your servants hands;
Blessed by your Spirit above.
Nourish our souls, as we share of your bread,
Feed the hunger of our hearts, minds, bodies
and spirits. Amen.

(Partake)

For the Cup - hand out

Words of Institution

In the same way, Jesus took the ordinary cup that was set before them,
A cup filled with nectar,
Grown, nurtured and pressed by ordinary
Hands
And transformed it into a symbol by which we remember our covenant saying:
When you share this cup together, remember me.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God of Love and Faithfulness, through this bread, we are drawn closer to you, and our calling to our neighbours.

Thank you for this cup,
Grown in the earth;
Prepared by your servant's hands;
Blessed by your Spirit above.
Satisfy us as we share of your cup,
Quench the thirst of our hearts, minds, bodies
and spirits. Amen.

(Partake)

Closing Prayer of Thanksgiving

God of all people, at this table we received the bread offered to us by our brothers and sisters. We give thanks for this bread, and the calling you have placed on our hands.

Jesus, light of the world, at this table we received the cup offered to us by our brothers and sisters. We give thanks for this cup, and the calling you have placed on our hearts.

Holy Spirit, bless this meal that has been offered to us by our brothers and sisters. We give thanks for this meal, and the calling you have placed in our spirits.

We give thanks to you God, three-in-one, for this meal which equips, inspires, and sustains the calling you've placed in our lives.

As we go forth, answering your call, may our love for you Jesus, help bring forth your kingdom. We offer our love, modelling your grace, and shining your light, for the whole world to see. May we continue to love you Jesus with all our head, all our heart, all our spirit, and our hands, feet, and mouths.

This we pray with thanksgiving, in the name of Christ, Amen