

Crazy

This Wednesday we will welcome to our motley crew here at St Elizabeth's two crazy people.

They are Barbara and David.

David and Barbara are members of the Third Order of St Francis, lay people who have ditched all of their possessions and all the attachments of their formerly middle class lives.

Like I said: crazy!

They both hold doctorate degrees, they are life long Episcopalians.

Barbara is an artist, David a linguist.

For the last fifteen years or so they created or served in a number of houses of hospitality, known as Catholic Worker houses; with most of those years working out of an abandoned railway station in Brazil.

They are joining us to begin a similar operation here in our rectory; which will become a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality.

As you may have noticed, we've been fixing up the rectory: "we" meaning Charles Steffey!

We've be able to replace the plastic plumbing with real pipes and the aluminum wiring with copper wires, installing new windows and so on because of a generous grant of \$100,000 from our friends at the Coalition for Creative Housing.

Like Barbara and David, this Coalition is also made up of crazy people.

They are the folks who in the early 1980's fought against the State government that wanted to evict the Hansen's disease patients living at Hale Mohalu in Pearl City.

Some of you may remember that struggle as the State turned off water and electricity while a core group of patients and their supporters refused to move.

The State wanted to put in an athletic complex and powerful politicians were behind it all - because, who cares about some leprosy patients?

Well, even though the patients were hauled away by sheriffs in 1983, the crazy people who took on the state ultimately saw to it that instead of an athletic complex, housing for the elderly and infirm was built on the site.

Today, the buildings are named after the Hale Mohalu patients who so bravely fought for those homes.

And from this development of affordable rentals came a developers fee, which is where the \$100,000 came from to allow us to turn our rectory into a Catholic Worker house.

So what is the Catholic Worker?

The Catholic Worker was started by two other crazy people: Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, back in the 1930s, in depression era New York City.

At a time when so many were thrown out of work, when the disparity between the rich and everyone else was almost as bad as it is today, Dorothy and Peter felt called to create houses that would reflect the gospel's invitation to care for the most vulnerable, with few rules, and open tables, and a profound trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Those who call themselves Catholic Workers pray, they serve others, they work for non-violent solutions to our world's problems, and they try their best to reflect, in day to day living, the kind of life that Jesus calls us all to be part of: lives of compassion and mercy and forgiveness, rather than lives based on competition and striving and "me first."

Like I said, crazy!

All of which is a wonderful lead in for today's gospel, which itself yells out: "Crazy!"

There's a man dressed like a caveman eating grasshoppers and honey, yelling into the wind out in the wilderness for people to repent, meaning to turn around, to change their minds about everything they think is important.

He has no degree.

No one ordained him.

He has no church, no job, no license.

The folks that hold the reins of power dismiss him as a kook.

Of course they do, because "he's radically questioning the very legitimacy of the existing religious order by doing religious practices on his own authority." R. Rohr, *Jesus' Plan For a New World*, 99.

But one fellow doesn't reject John.

Joining with the prostitutes and tax collectors and other outcasts, Jesus makes his way to John, and the skies are "torn apart."

Remember a few weeks ago, during Advent, the prophet crying out: "O when will you tear open the heavens and come down?!"

What a crazy request!

We know the answer to such prayers: Never!

Everyone knows God stays in his heaven, leaving the dirty work of getting through this life to our own best thinking.

And yet that was the prophet's plea, and today, as crazy John stands hip deep in the muddy waters of the Jordan, as a young man approaches, submitting to baptism, why, lo and behold, the skies are indeed torn open, and two distinct realities, heaven and earth, become one.

Which is not only crazy, it's dangerous!

It's dangerous because it means that God is on the loose in the world.

Love is on the loose.

Not gooey eyed sweet sentimental love, but frightening, ego-shattering, change-your-ways Love --- a love that's welcoming of the addict, the hooker, the losers and the liars....the love that hangs on a cross for the likes of me and you — that love — it's on the loose!

Just as the spirit of God hovers over the waters at the dawn of creation, bringing order out of chaos, so today the Son of God enters the waters of the Jordan to bring all of humanity out of death into life.

And Jesus does it in a crazy way.

Rather than coming on the clouds of heaven with bands of angels armed to the teeth, he comes simply, quietly, as a human being.

Without fanfare, he steps into the waters of the Jordan, in solidarity with sinners.

In water and mud, Jesus is baptized.

Soon, with dirt and spit mixed together, Jesus heals the blind man; with a touch, the hemorrhaging woman is made well; with pieces of Sara Bush's bread and sips of inexpensive wine, his body and blood is given over to us each and every week.

You have to admit, it's crazy!

But it's the best kind of crazy.

It's the crazy that refuses to be crazy in the way the world has gone crazy. Peter Maurin.

The world's craziness is all about power and prestige, money and fame... things that not only don't last, but things that are so very empty of meaning.

The world's craziness is all about climbing the ladder of success, only to realize, once you reach the top, that maybe you climbed the wrong ladder!

God's craziness is in Paul's adventures that we read about this morning in Acts.

Folks get baptized in the wild and unpredictable Spirit, and before you know it, they're talking in funny languages.

The languages the Spirit teaches them to speak are neither gibberish nor classical French, but the languages of mercy, of compassion, of gentleness.

In a world that values power and domination and control, to speak those languages is to be accounted by most to indeed be among the crazy.

Yet it's the same crazy that motivated a middle aged, health challenged deaconess named Emma Drant, to hustle up money from the wealthy Proctor family, and then make the long voyage by rail and then by sea from Ohio to Honolulu, to begin a settlement house, which she named St Elizabeth's, whose mission was to welcome the then most unwelcome Chinese immigrants.

It's the same crazy that motivated David and Barbara to walk away from family and friends, jobs and security, to seek a life on the edges, living among people on the edges, so as to perhaps have a chance to encounter this God, who seems most at home along the edges.

It is the same crazy that keeps every one of you coming back to this place, supporting this place, loving this place, as it changes and grows, finding friends from far and wide filling these seats.

So if someone calls you crazy for the way we live out the gospel here, give 'em a big smile: you're in terrific company!

+amen

