

I've not lost my mind!

Acts 26: 12-32

November 8, 2020

Have you ever felt that you lost your mind? Or have you ever told someone that they have lost their minds? What made you think you've lost your mind, or someone lost their minds? You may know the movie, *About Schmidt*. It is about a man retiring from his position as an actuary of a life insurance company in Omaha, Nebraska. After a retirement dinner, he finds it is hard to adjust to his new life, feeling useless. Jack Nicholson who starred Schmidt character played it well showing a man who spent his whole life for work and then lost his mind at the end of his career. A man from a white upper middle-class corporate executive family of Midwest lost his mind once he lost his career. That's about Mr. Schmidt. How about you and me? This pandemic rob us of our routines, such as taking a train, going to office, talking to co-workers, eating lunch at a favorite restaurant, taking family to a vacation, visiting parents or children, going to church, going to exercise, or having special outings to cultural events with friends. We lost them and we lost our minds. But a real interesting thing about this pandemic is what we have lost because of it shows how much we are privileged to have all of them as granted.

Some Bible stories are even more dramatic than movies with juicy details. There was a man in the Bible who lost his mind and did so many unthinkable crazy things. He was king David. Leonard Cohen sang this story in his song, *Hallelujah*, as a very broken hallelujah. One spring day king David sent his soldiers to a battle ground and he took a nap. He didn't go with them. After a nap he went up to the rooftop of his palace. It was higher than any house or any building around the palace. He saw a woman taking a bath. She was beautiful and he wanted her. He found out that she was a wife of one of his soldiers who was fighting for him in the battle. Being crazy about her, king David took her in his bed. Later she sent a message to him that she was pregnant with his child. He summoned her husband to the palace to make him sleep with his wife, but the cover-up plan didn't work out. King David made another plan putting her husband in the front line of battle and ordering all other soldiers to withdraw without him. He was killed there. Then, king David took his wife. King David totally lost his mind. It was really a broken hallelujah. But he didn't know it because he was blinded by his own power and privileges. When he was a young shepherd, he was faithful, courageous, and full of integrity. But once he accumulated more and more power and privileges, he lost his mind. He was a mad man. We may say, "oh, all kings did those things at that time. He was a king, and she was just a woman. What's a big deal." But God didn't go with those dirty excuses. God sent prophet Nathan to the king and accused all his wrong doings. In God's eyes sexual misconducts, lies, hurting innocent people, and any moral failures are not justified, especially when they are the leaders of church, society, and nation. That's why the Bible keeps king David's shameful stories as they are.

In today's reading we see another person who is accused of being mad or being lost his mind. It is Paul. After he was arrested in Jerusalem he was transferred to Caesarea and waiting there for two years for a trial. A new leader Festus came into the power and he began to dig in Paul's case. Festus first listened to Jewish leaders and decided to have Paul's trial with King Agrippa in Caesarea. On the trial day King Agrippa, queen Bernice, Festus came with great fanfare. The Bible says they entered the auditorium with the military commanders and the city's most prominent people. I want you take a minute here and make a picture in your mind. In a Roman city, Caesarea, there is a big auditorium. In that fancy room a ceremony starts with a great fanfare and politically powerful people come in with military leaders in their uniforms and other prominent people. It looks great and exciting, isn't it, especially with military presence? But what's the reason of this great gathering? Let us do not

be blinded by all shining and glittering sounds and scenes. Let us pay attention to the reason why they gathered there. After their great entrance, Paul, the real reason of their gathering comes in by himself without a fanfare, without even one lawyer who can defend him. They gathered there to have a trial against Paul. In a heated moment of trial, Festus accuses Paul that he has lost his mind and he is mad. He says, "You've lost your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you mad!" But Paul replies, "I am not mad, most honorable Festus! I am speaking what is sound and true."

The people who had all the power and privileges accused Paul that he had lost his mind and was mad. But who is mad really? We may think Paul is mad because Agrippa and Festus have all the power to let him go free if he is cooperative. That's the logic of the world. People try to see where is power and line up with the power and do whatever the power wants them to do. That's the way of the world. We see that happens everywhere. But that's not God's way and Paul insists he speaks what is sound and true. Interesting thing is those whom the world considers successful and powerful are soon forgotten, but Paul is not forgotten.

I want you to remember that Paul came from a privileged family background. He was from Benjamin tribe, studied in Jerusalem under one of the most prominent rabbis in his time, belonged to pharisees, and the most importantly, he had Roman citizenship. He was like modern day Mr. Schmidt who is from a white upper middle-class well-educated corporate executive family of Midwest. If Paul lived his life like Mr. Schmidt, he might have had a secure and safe life until his retirement. Then, what might happen to him eventually? Like Mr. Schmidt, Paul might have lost his mind without knowing what is sound and true. But Paul had a different life. He had a conversion experience.

In his trial Paul shares his conversion story of how he met risen Christ on the road to Damascus and how he received a message to bring it to gentiles. Since then, he was faithful and obedient to the mission given to him until the day he died. He proclaimed they should change their hearts and lives and turn to God, and that they should demonstrate this change in their behavior. That was his message. If Mr. Schmidt had a conversion experience, even a small one, before his retirement, he might have had a different life story. What's your conversion story? I believe during this pandemic all of us have at least one conversion experience that we realize something new. I hope that conversion experience changes our hearts and lives and keeps us from going mad. For me I am realizing how beautiful this world is and how much we are blessed knowing and believing God, the creator, Son the redeemer and the Holy Spirit the Sustainer. God is for us and who can go against us accusing that we are mad? Today, we dare to say that we have not lost our minds because we set our minds on God and we are not blinded by the power of the world. Thanks be to God.