

**Jesus Unhinged**  
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*John 2:13-25*

There's a story from a few years back that you might have heard about. There was this old fresco of Jesus in a church in Spain. Over the years, it was showing some pretty bad water damage. So an eighty-year-old lady from that church got some paint and decided to give the old fresco a facelift. By the time she was done with it—or rather, by the time the local authorities made her stop—the piece of art was totally botched. One person who saw it said it looked like *"a crayon sketch of a very hairy monkey in an ill-fitting tunic."*

Much like the Temple leaders in our story today, the authorities asked the elderly lady: *By whose authority did you do this thing?* She told them she had permission from the local priest to restore the fresco. She insisted that, *"The priest knew it. I never tried to hide anything."*<sup>1</sup>

To be honest, if I was in that situation I'd deny knowing anything about it too! Wouldn't you?

Here's why I'm telling you this story now. It's a fact that humans resist change. Now, I'm not at all defending what that lady did to that fresco. It was a hot mess.

But what I'm getting at is; there are times when changes have to be made. A change of direction. A change of vision. A change in the rules or the structure of an organization. A change of scenery. But for a lot of reasons, we don't handle change well. We have this image in our minds of how things ought to be, and it's usually about the way they've always been.

Maybe, on our better days, we can acknowledge that the way we've been doing things are a little worn out, stale, or weather-beaten. But as soon as someone says, *"Hey, this isn't working anymore; we need to do this, instead"* ... we get antsy. Some folks even freak out, become unhinged.

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<sup>1</sup> Raphael Minder. "Despite Good Intentions, a Fresco in Spain Is Ruined." The New York Times. August 23, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/24/world/europe/botched-restoration-of-ecce-homo-fresco-shocks-spain.html>

We become comfortable with our old, familiar, well-worn, weather-beaten ways. Change messes with our vision of how things are supposed to be. So in our minds, whoever is coming out and saying, things need to change is about as welcome as the Spanish lady was to update that old fresco.

And it's especially true when it has to do with church stuff. We know deeply significant matters are at stake, and we want to know what authority anyone has for coming in and shaking things up. That's basically why the Temple leaders were so freaked out when Jesus disrupted a system that had been in place for hundreds of years. He was saying crazy-sounding things about how that temple was going to go away. Jesus caused quite a ruckus in the place their ancestors had sacrificed so much to build.

If you're here today and you're one of those people who resist change, I have excellent news for you. You're absolutely normal. Humans are wired that way. There's these little things in the deepest, most primitive parts of our brains called basal ganglia that are responsible for making us feel really good when we're in a secure routine. Like, if you get into a car and reflexively buckle your safety belt—that's your basal ganglia protecting you by developing a habit.

But those little basal ganglia can also betray us. If you're having trouble quitting smoking or starting flossing—that's also your basal ganglia. They've got you hard-wired, locked into a routine that's bad for you.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes we need to do the hard thing and fight against our basal ganglia until we've made whatever change needs to be made. The good news is, eventually we will be re-wired to feel good about doing the new thing.

But when someone comes around disturbing your peace and disrupting your routine, you at least want to know why you should change. What do I get if I embrace this new thing? What can you show me to convince me to do the hard, uncomfortable work of fighting against my basal ganglia?

That's basically what the Jewish leaders in our story today were asking Jesus as a follow-up to their authority question: *What miraculous sign will you show us? Prove it.*

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<sup>2</sup> Ralph Ryback. "Why We Resist Change." Psychology Today. January 25, 2017. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-truisms-wellness/201701/why-we-resist-change>.

In John's Gospel, Jesus' miracles are called signs. The signs in John's Gospel announce that big changes are on the way, whether anyone is ready for them or not. Bible scholars call John 2 through 11—roughly the first half of the Gospel— The Book of Signs. This part of John records seven signs Jesus did. And those signs point toward what God is doing through Jesus. They reveal God's plans for healing the world.

Signs like Jesus turning the water to wine; and feeding 5,000 people with the sardines and cracker's from some kid's lunchbox point us toward a God who wants to transform our need into joyful abundance.

Or when Jesus healed a man who'd been paralyzed most of his life, and another man who'd been blind from birth—these signs point to God's longing to bring healing into our lives. To set us free from hopelessness and despair, so that we can live to the fullest.

Or when Jesus was summoned to heal the child of a royal official, which is a story about two people reaching out to each other across ethnic lines to bring about healing and wholeness. It's a sign of what God is working out for humanity through Christ. In John 3.16, Jesus said: For God so loved the world. When Jesus healed the official's son, it was a sign of how big the world God loves really is. It's you. It's me. It's the stranger up the road or across the ocean. God's love embraces all creation.

Standing there in the Jerusalem temple, where people were coming to worship on the most holy day of the year, Jesus told them: Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up.

Of course, anyone who heard Jesus say this probably thought he was talking crazy talk. That temple had been at the center of their religious life for centuries. It was the place where God dwelled among his people. Why should it be torn down? And how could anyone rebuild something in three days that had taken over forty six years to build in the first place?

Even Jesus' own followers didn't understand what he meant. John says it was only when Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead three days later that they realized the temple Jesus was talking about was his body.

The Jerusalem authorities demanded that he give them a sign that would show he had authority to disrupt the life of the temple. To shake their understanding of God right down to its foundations.

But even after the promised sign had been fulfilled, and Jesus was raised on the third day, most of them had a really difficult time embracing the changes he brought. Their basal ganglia just never could adapt.

Sadly, that happens to a lot of folks, even some really good people. Even when the changes we need to make are healing and liberating and give us a chance to live life to the fullest.

So, here's where we can take this lesson about signs; and botched frescoes; and basal ganglia; and apply it to our own lives. When the world looks at us—at me, at you, at us together—do they see Jesus? Maybe a little weather-beaten. Maybe our colors have faded a little. But do they see Jesus in us?

Or do they maybe see a different picture? Like that ugly fresco. The one that doesn't look like Jesus anymore. Something monstrous that people would run away from, or maybe laugh at and not take seriously?

When the world looks at us, do they see Jesus?

The signs in John's Gospel point out what our lives and our church will look like when we let Jesus dwell among us. We're going to be living by the signs. We're going to be celebrating. We're going to be reaching out to bring healing and reconciliation among ourselves and in the world. We're going to be stepping out in faith to do hard and scary things, trusting that God will get us where we need to be. We're going to be living life to the fullest, because we know and trust that God won't let death have the final word.

But what do we need to change to look more like Jesus? That's where things get scary, isn't it? That's when my basal ganglia start freaking out. We get defensive. We resist. We want to know by what authority we are asked to change things about ourselves.

I get it. I totally get it. That's why I'm not going to ask you to change everything right now. Before all of us in this room put our weary heads on our pillows tonight let's figure out one area of our lives that doesn't look like Jesus. Pray over it. Then get to work.

Maybe there's a relationship in your life that's damaged, and you need to reach across your comfort zones and work for reconciliation. Or maybe you're in a rut and you're not living life to the fullest and you need to get out and celebrate more with friends and family - especially people in this church family. Or maybe it's something simple. Like you might feel to speak hope and love and joy into someone else's life by sending them an encouraging note or visiting them to see how they're doing.

It's totally okay to start small. But whatever it is, commit to it.

I also want to invite you to imagine the difference it will make to your life, and how the world sees Christ in you, if you commit to make this change. Will it relieve a burden you're carrying? Will it help you trust God's love for you more? Will it bring healing to a place in your life that's hurting?

One more thing—you might want to try make these changes with a buddy. People who know about these kinds of things say those change-resistant functions in our brains don't put up as much of a fight if there are other people working on it with us.

In today's story, we saw a scary side of Jesus that makes some people uncomfortable. Jesus unhinged. But seeing him this way also opens us to see more fully the beauty of who Jesus is and what he came to do for us. My hope for all of us is that we'll commit to doing something that might be uncomfortable or scary or outside of our comfort zones but that helps others see Christ in us. And when our basal ganglia start freaking out, demanding to know who authorized you to do this new thing, you can answer with confidence: It was Jesus. Amen.

