My New Testament professor had a phrase he used to throw out now and then when we came across something odd in the Gospels. He would say, “If you were cooking up a religion that is something you would leave out.” Examples of his use of this phrase where with items like women being the first to witness the risen Christ. If you wonder, why this is odd it is because at that time women were not seen as legitimate witnesses in judicial matters – so to say they witnessed it meant nothing at best. Or it might come when Jesus hangs out with tax collectors and sinners. His point was that much of the things that show up in the Gospels are not things that would show up if we were to put a committee together to design the perfect religion. Because such a committee would be comprised of humans and so would have very human views of power, authority and anything else you want to throw in. And the thing is it is not just a few isolated incidents, if you think about it, Christianity is a very weird religion. I mean just look at the beginning of Peter’s speech today where we read, “Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, ‘Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.’” Really? The beginning of our religion is a crucifixion in a second-rate part of the Roman Empire? N.T Wright stated that, “Crucifixion was regarded in the ancient world as so horrible, so revolting, so degrading that you didn’t mention it in polite society.” And that is where we start? When humans cook up religions the gods look a lot different – they are strong and powerful, with flowing hair and good teeth. They would never submit themselves to anything that would appear weak, let alone the most miserable, humiliating and shameful of deaths. And so yes, it is weird, but it is also for this reason, among many others, that it is true. It is precisely because it is so contra to our human impulses that it must be speaking to us from another place. A place where love and goodness are the currency, not power and antipathy. Jesus came to turn the world upside down.

 If you don’t believe me let’s look at a few phrases from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says among other things, “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Jesus is saying that when the world turns against you, you are blessed. And implicit in this statement is the idea that the way the world functions is what is backwards, not what Jesus espouses. The world has an autoimmune disorder where it rejects the very thing that can bring it life. Christianity is weird because it shows us the ways of God. And the world is established on the ways of men, so of course Christianity is going to look weird. Remember what we hear in Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.” You see, in the eyes of the world, we have signed up for a backwards religion – strength is found in weakness and glory in crucifixion.

 Now, of course, this does not mean that every time we make someone mad or are told that we are wrong we are doing the work of God. Sometimes we are jerks and people are right to get mad at us. Our antagonism to the world comes when the world is doing things that are against God.

 And so while Christianity is weird it is also beautiful because what it opposes are the things on this earth which are evil. Christ came to bring peace and the world crucified him, but that does not mean that we are to give up on what Christ has brought to us. So as we end I want to read some of the prayer attributed to St. Francis. “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring love. Where there is offence, let me bring pardon. Where there is discord, let me bring union. Where there is error, let me bring truth. Where there is doubt, let me bring faith. Where there is despair, let me bring hope. Where there is darkness, let me bring your light. Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.” May we be weird like this now and forevermore.