

November 25, 2018
#50
Mark 6:14-29
“Good News – We Can Change”

Herod the king heard about these things, because the name of Jesus had become well-known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and this is why miraculous powers are at work through him.”¹⁵ Others were saying, “He is Elijah.” Still others were saying, “He is a prophet like one of the ancient prophets.”¹⁶ But when Herod heard these rumors, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised to life.”

¹⁷ He said this because Herod himself had arranged to have John arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of Herod’s brother Philip. Herod had married her,¹⁸ but John told Herod, “It’s against the law for you to marry your brother’s wife!”¹⁹ So Herodias had it in for John. She wanted to kill him, but she couldn’t.²⁰ This was because Herod respected John. He regarded him as a righteous and holy person, so he protected him. John’s words greatly confused Herod, yet he enjoyed listening to him.

²¹ Finally, the time was right. It was on one of Herod’s birthdays, when he had prepared a feast for his high-ranking officials and military officers and Galilee’s leading residents.²² Herod’s daughter Herodias came in and danced, thrilling Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the young woman, “Ask me whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.”²³ Then he swore to her, “Whatever you ask I will give to you, even as much as half of my kingdom.”

²⁴ She left the banquet hall and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?”

“John the Baptist’s head,” Herodias replied.

²⁵ Hurrying back to the ruler, she made her request: “I want you to give me John the Baptist’s head on a plate, right this minute.”²⁶ Although the king was upset, because of his solemn pledge and his guests, he didn’t want to refuse her.²⁷ So he ordered a guard to bring John’s head. The guard went to the prison, cut off John’s head,²⁸ brought his head on a plate, and gave it to the young woman, and she gave it to her mother.²⁹ When John’s disciples heard what had happened, they came and took his dead body and laid it in a tomb.

We continue to live in Thanksgiving. What are you grateful for? What gifts have you received from God? We pause each year to celebrate and give thanks for the abundance of material things. Jesus told us to rejoice in something much greater. We give thanks for the relationship with God which has been restored by Jesus Christ. We celebrate the power, hope and joy provided by the Holy Spirit who is with us each moment of every day. With that in mind, we can maintain an attitude of gratitude all year at all times. I encourage you to continue to express thanks by loving and giving.

Today is the last Sunday of the Christian year. It is called Christ the King Sunday. Today we remember that there is coming a day “when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more and the morning breaks eternal bright and fair.” Christ

will return in all his glory and assume His rightful place as the king of kings and lord of lords throughout the rest of eternity.

Next Sunday Advent starts and we prepare our hearts and souls to welcome the arrival of King Jesus when we will sing “Silent Night – Jesus, Lord at thy birth”.

We will pause from Mark’s gospel and we will continue in January.



Today’s reading is about John the Baptist. There are only two places in the Mark’s gospel that are not about Jesus. Both of these stories are about John the Baptist.

We remember John the Baptist from the very first chapter, “John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins” He said: “Repent, for God’s kingdom is at hand.”

It is very appropriate for today, too. John is instructing us to prepare for the coming of Jesus. It is one thing to hear the generic “repent.” We all know we should change and live better lives. It is quite another thing to hear our specific sins explicitly named and to be told to forsake those sins. We usually do not like it.



John the Baptist was fearless. He had no interest in being politically correct. Sin is sin and must be eradicated no matter the cost. Like us, Herod and Herodias did not enjoy hearing about their sin.

Everyone including Herod and Herodias knew the 7th and 10th commandments. “Thou shalt not adultery.” “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.”

John the Baptist was correct. “Do not lust after your brother’s wife, do not lust for that woman, for that man.” He was not being generic. He was pointing a finger and saying, “You have broken the law.”

John the Baptist was in prison because he dared to be the voice of righteousness. “Herod himself had arranged to have John arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of Herod’s brother Philip”.

She wanted him killed immediately but could not because her current husband was intrigued by John. Herod respected John as a holy person and liked to listen to John.

King Herod was a puppet king. He was appointed by Caesar and was in power only because the Romans put him there.

It gets confusing because there are 6 different Herod’s in the Bible – all of them puppet kings. None of them were very nice people. Some even murdered their own children to make sure they stayed in power.

Herod’s Antipas father was Herod the Great who conquered Jerusalem for the Romans, built the Second Temple, and massacred countless people—including all the baby and toddler boys of Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus and died shortly thereafter. The family tree is very confusing. It was a different Herod that motivated Joseph to settle in Nazareth with Mary and Jesus after their exile in Egypt.



The third Herod, Antipas, went to visit his brother the 4th Herod, Philip, and decided he wanted Phillip's wife. She divorced her husband and got married to her husband's brother. Herod Antipas also divorced his wife.

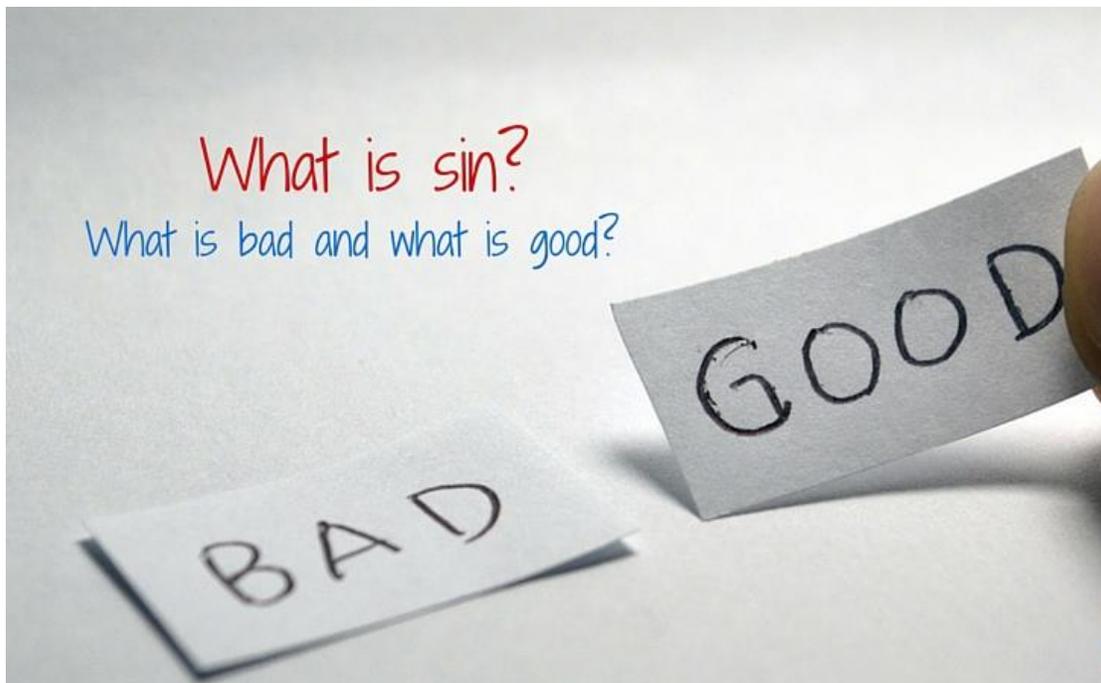
What a mess! Sounds like something out to Hollywood.

John the Baptist boldly declared, "It's against the law for you to marry your brother's wife!" It is interesting to see that he put John in prison because of Herodias.

Why was Herodias threatened by John the Baptist? Was she afraid of her future or her reputation? Was she afraid to lose her status and her wealth. She likely was not secure and she was ready to do all she can to protect her position in life. There's a line that shows up in most commentaries: "The only safe place she thought she could write her marriage certificate was on the back of John's death warrant."

She thinks, *If I can silence the voice saying "repent," I won't have to think about it anymore. And then I'll be secure. It's not my sin causing my insecurity! It's him!* It's not my sin causing my insecurity, it is John.

We are so good at telling ourselves we are not sinners. My sin is not the worst sin for sure. I need this. How I would live without it? It is my life. Then we silence those who tell us otherwise. We ignore. We shut our ears. We can be very mean to those who challenge us and tell us it is not good for you to continue to live in sin.



I believe the most dangerous life to live is saying I do not know what sin is anymore. We hear the philosophy that everything is relative. We get confused as to what is right or wrong.

The Bible sets our standard for what is right and wrong.

Jesus said the truth will set you free. The truth often hurts and brings a negative reaction. The question remains: "Do you truly want to know the truth – the truth that you might not even like?"

I believe God wants us to reveal the truth. I cannot imagine God, who loves, who cares and calls us to live holy lives will hide the truth from us.

God who gave His Son, so we will be saved wants us to know the truth. How much do you pray for the Holy Spirit to come and reveal you the truth? How much you read the Bible for your growth and knowledge of truth? We divide into small groups of believers, who are seeking to be holy and to be disciples, to help each other in the way of truth? Do you have a mentor? Do you fast to know the truth? The truth will make you free from the bondage to sin.

Antipas loved hearing the truth, but did he change his life? Herodias hated hearing the truth and searched for the opportunity.

Herodias probably had her own truth. Many of the TV comedies are about people who have their own version of truth. Hyacinth in "Keeping Up Appearances", Fred Samford and Archie Bunker have their own understanding to truth even when confronted with reality. Sadly, we also get lost in our own minds and do not realize it.

I bet, if you asked Herodias at that time, you would almost believe she was right.

It is good to ask ourselves: "How do I react to statements that hurt me? Most of the time I bite my tongue. Sometimes I try to say what I think was incorrect. What do you do when somebody critiques you or says you were wrong? How do you react when someone hurts you?

Some of us are better at self-control than others. The most important part is what we do after we get hurt or confronted.

Herodias could not wait until she settled the score. She kept scheming, planning and thinking how to totally be free from that voice. Matthew tells us that Judas waited for his opportunity to betray Christ and it came. It is not like catching a cold. You sow a wind and you reap a whirlwind. You keep on thinking and you keep on playing the words you heard. Your anger grows and you become captured, enslaved by how much you hate that person.

The only way to stop is to change your thoughts. How do you do that? You start by praying for the person and following Jesus' instruction to bless those who persecute you. It is not easy and you might even think it is impossible. The good news is that by the power of the Holy Spirit it is possible. The choice is yours. It is imperative that you do so if you want joy and freedom. Even if your heart is not ready you start by blessing that person with the best gifts you have to offer. Any time you feel right to be angry, you choose to bless and pray for the best for that person.

Herodias finally had her opportunity. It was on one of Herod's birthdays, when he had prepared a feast for his high-ranking officials and military officers and Galilee's leading residents. His step-daughter, Salome, the daughter of Herodias, came in and danced, thrilling Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the young woman, "Ask me whatever you wish, and I will give it to you."²³ Then he swore to her, "Whatever you ask I will give to you, even as much as half of my kingdom."

I do not know how about you, but for me it is already wrong that the daughter danced in front of her father and pleased him. I doubt that was just a waltz.

In front of all these high status guests Antipas declared. "I will you give you whatever you ask." Wow! He could not give half of kingdom because it did not even belong to him. He is full of himself and probably full of wine too.

I bet Herodias had planned it very well. She knew her husband and knew what he liked. We can be so caught up in our own self-righteousness that we will go to any extreme. What a tragedy!

About 6 years ago one of my sisters-in-law stop communicating with me, my mother and my other brothers. We found out that about 10 years ago she started to keep a record of all our wrongdoings. When she stopped talking to us, I asked her what I did wrong. She sent me about 5 things that hurt her. Some of them I even could not remember happening. I thought she was so wrong about some of them. She said the last thing in her cup was that Andrew unfriended her on Facebook. Seriously?

I did not try to explain myself. I just asked of forgiveness. I did not receive it. I know I am not alone and we all have a broken relationship. We cannot make others forgive us, but we can forgive others. We all can pray and bless them in our thoughts and hearts. We can continue to love them and their families. That's what I choose to do.

Herod Antipas promised to give anything to Salome. She went and ask her mother. "What should I ask for?"

"John the Baptist's head – on a platter – Now!"



²⁵ Hurrying back to the ruler, she made her request: “I want you to give me John the Baptist’s head on a plate, right this minute.” Right this minute. We want it right now.

What do you want for the one who bothered you with his or her words? Is prison not enough? No. You can still hear the voice. Better to totally get rid of him. Right now.

Herod Antipas was caught between a rock and a hard place.

He liked John the Baptist. Herod knew John was a righteous and holy man. But knowing was not enough. He cared more for what people will say about him if he did not keep what he has promised in front of all these guests. How important to you is what other people will think about you?

I ask myself. Whom do you want to please? People or God? Am I a people pleaser? Am I basing my decisions on what other people think?

Do I have enough character to ask, “What God will say? Will it please God?”

I think it is important to notice that loving and pleasing people is not the same. Frequently my desire to please people has very little to do with the people I’m trying to please and very much to do with myself. It might appear that I’m thinking about them, but I’m only thinking about them in reference to me.

- How would this make me look?
- How will they feel about me?
- What will be my reputation?

Love is always about others. Pleasing is about me.

I believe we can change. I believe the Good News for us is that we can change by the strength of the Holy Spirit. It starts by listening to the Spirit of God and recognizing our own sinfulness and the need of transformation in our lives.

It is not about changing others but changing myself.

John the Baptist stayed faithful through the worst circumstances. He lost his life, but he did not lose his soul. Give yourself to prayer, daily reading of Scripture, a group of believers who seek to live a holy life and be faithful disciples. Do not let hurt to stay and grow inside of you. Choose to pray and bless. If there is a sin in your life, do not silence the voice, repent and change your life. Live in freedom.

One last thought – Is Salome, who danced for Herod, the same person we read about in Mark 16 who went with Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James to find the empty tomb on that first Easter? God’s grace, mercy and love is so great that no

matter how bad our history is we are each welcomed to come a discover the resurrection along with the peace, joy, hope and freedom it offers.