



GOSPEL

Mark 6:14-29

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.

King Herod heard of the healings and other miracles, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When Herodias' daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the Baptist." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptizer on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.



6th Sunday after Trinity | Sermon – Sunny Schwarz

*“This is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption
as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.”*

Over the last months, as part of my training, I read a book called “The cost of discipleship” by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

It’s such an interesting and inspiring read – and very moving indeed.

It’s a compelling statement of the demands of sacrifice and ethical consistency; written by a man whose life and thoughts were expressed by a new type of leadership.

Bonhoeffer was inspired by the gospel, and what shines through everywhere is the spirit of Christian humanism and the call for civic duty.

Two men – John the Baptist and Dietrich Bonhoeffer - locked away because leaders wouldn’t want them to speak the truth or remind them of their lack of faith and wrong-doing.

God comes first for both these humble and faithful men -
and what a similarity despite almost 2000 years between them!

They speak when others stay silent
and they speak with a firm voice because that is what God asks them to do.
Isn’t that the very essence of taking up the cross and follow Jesus?

What is it that God asks of us? What is his will for us today?

In our prayers of penitence we say:

The Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
with all your mind, and with all your strength.

And the second is this: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

There is no other commandment greater than these.

He, Herod couldn’t care less about God’s commandments it seems.



He broke his marriage and that of his brother by taking his brother's wife.
He violated the sixth commandment and the tenth.

Deep down, Herod knew John was right.

He knew that John was a true believer, a faithful follower of Jesus and as the good Christian he was, he couldn't and wouldn't turn a blind eye on him, on Herod Antipas, the rather unfaithful.

Especially since he was a leader, ruler of Galilee and Perea, a person of high rank and influence, who should have been an example to his people.

Herod saw who John was, that great man of God, and he didn't want to kill him but needed to silence him.

His authority was at stake and he wouldn't possibly want to give up this lustful and pleasant life that he was so used to.

And of course, he wanted to please his wife – Herodias, who was driven by hatred and blinded by an urge to see John dead and silenced forever. Why?

Because John the Baptist openly accused Herod of what so many thought:

“This is wrong. It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.”

Herod was a leader, but most definitely not a role-model,
not someone to look up to or a man of strong faith and full of obedience to God.

How do you think he felt when John reprimanded him?

Guilty? Ashamed?

Was he aware that now he had taken a step too far?

Maybe he didn't think a lot but simply tried to find an easy way out.

He put John in prison so nobody could hear him and his accusations anymore,
and the problem was solved.

But on his birthday, as Mark so vividly narrates, with plenty of drinks and music
and in the company of other influential men.... Suddenly all was lost.



We can assume that Herodias daughter Salome was a beautiful young woman who seduced these men with her dance.

Probably quite drunk already and maybe wanting to show off to his friends, he granted her a wish... And then he even confirmed his promise with an oath: *"Whatever you ask - I will give it to you."*

Everyone knew, of course, that this wasn't to be taken literally. But it was an oath that a king could not easily break if he did not want to lose face.

The girl hurried to see her mother for advice and we all know what happened next. Her mother only waited for her chance!

And Salome? Did she make that horrible request out of love for her mother? Seeing someone killed! At her age, she must have been aware of the consequences... And how can a mother ask something so cruel of her daughter?

Imagine this:

She enters back in, the music and the noise and everything else stops and she says: "Give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

Can you hear Herod swallowing and then staring at her in disbelief...

Why would she want to see John dead? Because her mother told her so – and now he could not turn back and refuse her request.

How did he feel now? Betrayed by his own wife in front of these people.

Cornered and tricked by her and the step-daughter.

Wouldn't you think that made him suddenly sober and well aware of his action?

No – he was in too deep to make a U-turn now.

In a blink of an eye, Herod chose to keep his face and not his faith.



How about everybody else? Were they enjoying the show?

Or were they silently disgusted?

All these high-ranking men who were supposed to keep law and order?

What about their spirit of Christian humanism and the call for civic duty...

Why did nobody see where this was leading to and offered support for poor John?

Maybe, just maybe, this could have been “the way out” for Herod.

One of them - just one, standing up, rejecting this ridiculous request and suggest to rather have a beautiful dress made for the step-daughter.

Another one might have come to his senses then.

And another one.

But what happens is that Salome gets her way.

The sad truth is that silence led to the killing of a man so pure at heart and obedient to God with no one interfering.

How did John the Baptist feel?

Relatively safe down there in his prison cell – not expecting his immediate death.

There couldn't have been much of a notice for him – as we heard, the party went on and just like the pigs' heads on the banquet tables,

John's head was presented on a platter only a short while later.

Did the executioner feel pity or just followed the king's orders?

All the different characters in this story – Salome, Herodias, Herod, all the guests and servants and musicians and guards... Nobody took notice, nobody seemed to care at all and nobody put an end to this tragedy.

What is God asking of us?

We can of course shake off the burden which is laid upon us, but only find that we have a still heavier burden to carry.

The Revd Stan Evans

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God wants us to lead.

He wants us to be a leading example.

He wants us to lead others closer to Him.

He wants us to lead our lives in accordance with His commandments.

What a task – and don't we all fail especially in not loving our neighbour as ourselves?

Day by day, we fail, and God forgives.

No matter what happens in our life, what goes wrong

or what deep injuries we carry within us,

it is important that we remain faithful to Jesus despite everything.

Jesus should be at the centre of our lives.

And we do have a duty to act correctly, to speak in sincerity, to live in faith.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains:

*"Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection.
But it is one and the same cross in every case."*

John could not change Herod. He died trying.

As much as we want to change other people – their thoughts, their behaviour, their attitude or their faithfulness – we might never achieve it.

That doesn't mean we should not try by putting our love and kindness to work.

But what we can do and should do in the first place, is to be a role model as much as possible, a faithful minister and a living example to those around us and those who come after us...

and make His way known to all.

Let us not be silent. Let us have courage, and let us share the Christian spirit by standing up for one another – in FAITH and HOPE and LOVE.

Because with God, all things are possible.

Amen.