

Sermon: "Truth and Consequences" - 7-15-18 - Mark 6:14-29

Grace and Peace on this 8th Sunday after Pentecost...Pause and reflect

Sometimes, when I want to destresses from my day and do something which is Mindfully Mindless, I will watch the "Game Show Network." It's fun to watch the old shows of my childhood and try to remember how all the different game shows functioned. So, this morning I thought I would have a little fun with you, with my own version of a "Game Show." On the slip of paper that you were given with your bulletin I would like you to write down the answer to a little trivia question. Everyone who gets the answer correct will get a chance to win whatever is in this wrapped box, which we will be revealed at the potluck meal following the service. So, here goes, first write your name on the slip of paper so we know who you are. This trivia question comes from my digest article and also the new RLC Facebook Page. Here goes; "So, What was the name of the "game show" that I referenced in my digest article?" No shouting out answers, just use your memories and if you didn't read it – take a guess and write an answer on the slip of paper and the ushers will collect them.

Was your answer "Truth or Consequences?" Do you remember that show? I remember it but haven't seen it lately on the Game Show Network. What I remember is that was a "zany" show where the contestants would have to answer a difficult question, often a question so strange that no one would be able to answer within the few seconds. If they weren't able to "Tell the Truth" they would have to suffer the consequences. When they couldn't answer the question they would suffer the "Consequences." These consequences were usually embarrassing stunts or situations. These consequences usually involved something messy and sticky or unpleasant to eat. "Truth or Consequences" was on the air from 1940-1988, and then went into syndication. When Bob Barker was the host from 1956-1975 he would typically end each show saying; "Hoping all your consequences are happy ones."

Our Gospel today is certainly NOT about "Happy Consequences" is it? What on earth – why is this story included at this point? Why does Mark include the longest version of

this story than the other Gospels – Luke doesn't even include it. Even stranger: beneath this story of John is the story of Jesus. The flashback is a flash-forward. Mark tips us off to the confusion over Jesus' mighty works. Herod foreshadows Pilate in the same way that John precedes Jesus. The gory details of the beheading of John the Baptist for Mark precedes the Cross of Christ.

In this passage we hear a story of consequences. Theologian Clifton Black, of Princeton Theological Seminary wrote this in one of his commentaries: *"Years ago, or only yesterday, The Washington Post quoted a lavishly paid lobbyist: "There are only two engines that drive Washington: One is greed, and the other is fear."'* That's a fitting description of Herod and his dysfunctional birthday party. Herod Antipas (ca. 21 B.C. -- post-A.D. 39): was the tetrarch, ruler or governor of Galilee who was answerable to the Emperor Tiberius. Most historians remember him as maladroit, lacking skill, cleverness and resourcefulness in handling political situations and considered a weak leader.

This story reveals just how dysfunctional and distorted perceived power can be. It's an important warning but strange at this point in Mark's Gospel, we are already beyond half way through Jesus' public ministry. It seems kind of late in the game (show) to talk about the "rules." It is a reminder that what Jesus has come to do is challenge, overturn, question, those individuals and those empires that rule by and uphold values completely opposite to the "in-breaking" of God's kingdom through Jesus.

Herod's wife, Herodias, did not like John the Baptist. That is pretty obvious; John was known to speak of controversial things, religious and spiritual, which went against the political climate of the time. John did not let his fear, which really isn't ever noticed, show when he addressed political and religious issues of the time. His words got him into trouble; his words were powerful and instilled fear into those listening for some reason. Probably, because he challenged the system and the core beliefs of those listening, including Herod and his wife. Herod regarded John to be a righteous and holy man and intended to protect him, but he after making the brash promise and for the sake of his reputation, he concedes and orders John's execution. In Mark 15:1-15, Pilate will

be faced with a similar situation, regarding Jesus. He is recorded as acknowledging Jesus' innocence. But, "wishing to satisfy the crowd," he concedes and order's Jesus' execution.

Both Herod in our Gospel today and Pilate at the trial of Jesus made concessions for the sake of their popularity. This is familiar, have you ever made decisions because you didn't want the other person or group to think less of you or feel you let them down? I have. The reason we make decisions sometimes may seem like it is good for others or the whole but it is really because one doesn't want or can't tolerate others disliking or being disappointed with the decisions that are made, even if they are wrong.

The words we choose have consequences, sometimes more than realized. A friend of mine shared this recent story of an interchange he had with an old friend on Facebook: *"So I get in touch with an old 'friend' I haven't seen in 5 years I ask the usual polite questions, how have things been? What are you up to? Etc. and the reaction I get is 'wow you used to be so nice looking but now your just FAT, what happened?' Lol 😊 needless to say I haven't responded to that Facebook message yet - but its further evidence that most gay people won't accept diversity even in their own community..."*

My friend's feelings are hurt, someone who he thought was a true friend turned out to be less than that. The words that were used weren't supportive, they seemed mean spirited. He had been so happy to make contact with this friend but everything changed with the comments which were made..

Among the almost 300 entries of bands, police departments, public officials, SD mayor, other politicians, colleges, churches, sports groups and other supportive groups such as PFLAG, and the Coronado School of the Arts marched in the annual the LGBTQ Pride Parade yesterday. It was great to see this group march alongside the others who were excited to share and be supportive the LGBTQ community.

The words and the actions of all involved makes a difference for those LGBTQ individuals, most of whom have struggled in one way or another to accept themselves and others by being set free by claiming who they are and whose they are, as Children of God.

Claiming one's truth is challenging because it means something will change and this kind of change has consequences. Denial and avoidance is most common for someone when struggling with matters of sexual orientation and identity. Everything in one's world changes when one speaks words of truth when "coming Out." Claiming and owning more of one's reality is freeing, and frightening at the same time, accepting one's self is challenging enough and worrying if others will be accepting adds a whole different dimension.

Yesterday there were 2 protesters, both standing in the designated areas, but one man was more noticeable than the other. He had a small but loud portable sound system. His goal was to scare people into "salvation" by repeating why he believed that everyone there was going to hell – and his sign said that. He was within his rights but he was also annoying for most were hearing him. Many chose to "Kill Him" with kindness by doing nice things for him, giving water and shading him with an umbrella. It didn't work, he was there most of the day, but the joy and laughter of the parade drowned out this one man out. The 40, 000 gathered with opened hearts and minds overshadowed this one negative voice.

With the resurgence of First Amendment rights in this country, a lot of this type of thing is happening – the negative voices shouting out but yesterday proved that the positive is more powerful than the negative. As we look for and bring positive understandings to the negative voices in the world around us things change – be the change you want to see. When we each speak our own truth, healthy positive things happen. is complete and it is born out of struggle in discovering more about the God who creates each day claims us.

John the Baptist knew that the truth would have consequences and it did for him, but he also knew that the truth – the real, deep, honest, soul searching, gut wrenching truth would set one free. This truth is complete and it is born out of struggle, Jesus Christ. Words of Truth have Consequences of grace, wholeness and unconditional love. Amen.

Brian Oltman, Pastor - Resurrection Lutheran Church - Coronado, CA - www.rl.church