

July 11, 2021

Christ Church Dallas

Mark 6: 14-29

### In Pursuit of Power

How often have we heard that power corrupts? Current events have showed us the truth of that statement in many ways.

The story of Herod and his execution of John the Baptist occurs between the sending of the disciples in last week's Gospel and their return in the verses that follow this story of John's death. The placement of this story has many implications for the ministry of Jesus and his disciples as well.

The story of Herod's execution of John is a flashback into the past. It is one of only two stories in the Gospels that do not include Jesus. Herod carried out this execution of John before Jesus began his mission of proclaiming the Good News. The reputation of Jesus scared Herod. He was concerned about any connection between Jesus and John. In this story we see Herod and his misuse of power by making foolish promises to his step daughter which leads to the tragedy of John's beheading. Herod becomes an example of abuse of power with all the paranoid thoughts and actions. Yet the story is a fascinating one and is known throughout the world. It is full of intrigue on many levels. Herod has immense power but seems to have no power over it. He becomes helpless due to the manipulation of others. Those who influence Herod

include his powerful community members who were his guests. His family members, including his wife and step daughter, took advantage of him. Due to his insecurity and his inept use of power, Herod executes John in spite of his admiration and fascination with John as a person and his message. This story is widely known and is the source of movies, operas and paintings.

How does this story fit into our spiritual lives? The story of Herod and John is a strange one. Why do we even include it into our worship? It is hard to see the “Good News” of the Gospel in this birthday party.

The message we are to glean from this text is that power is not moved by the Gospel message. Power does not change in response to the message to repent. Those who have great power want to hold onto it at all costs and will do anything to retain it. Sound familiar? Power and the pursuit of power does erode and contaminate us. We are all seduced by the idea that if we had more power or control over those around us, then we would have a better life. If only we could force people to do the right thing, then we could solve the world’s problems. What a slippery path that leads us all to desire to rule or control others. This struggle with power goes all the way back to our ancestors in the Garden.

In the intervening time between Jesus’ sending of the disciples and their return Mark shares us a flashback for us to read about Herod’s execution. Mark’s message for us is to realize that the world is inhabited by many “Herods” who abuse power. We are called to witness and proclaim the Good News to people who resist our message to repent. They do not want to change. We need to remember that

Jesus continued his ministry and proclamation in the face of great opposition. One of Mark's greatest messages is about Jesus as God living among us. Jesus continued on in his ministry to demonstrate the power of God that opposed the abuses of those in leadership. The death of Jesus is in parallel to the death of John. Pilate refused to use his power to provide justice in the trial of Jesus. Just like Herod, Pilate gave in to the leaders who demanded the death of Jesus. Pilate was manipulated to misuse his power in a similar way that Herod was powerless to act.

In the coming section of Mark's account of Jesus' ministry, he records the feeding of the 5,000. This miracle demonstrates God's compassion for those who are powerless. Jesus power to feed these hungry people was a message to the government of Rome. For all their military and political power they were unable to feed and provide for the well-being of their people,

Jesus came into the world to call us to repent. This call to repent is a challenge to change our attitude about the use of power. It is a call for action in opposition to the abuses of power in our world. Jesus gives us a new prospective for our lives.

We are told to speak truth to power. Jesus calls us to the power of repentance to change us and the world in which we live. Speaking truth to power provides us the empowerment to speak and act for the sake of the world.

May we experience the power of God's call to us to follow him into a world where power is abused. AMEN

