

July 14, 2024
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 6:14–29

REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Regardless of whether you are powerful or weak, no one wants to have their sins pointed out to them. You don't. I don't. No one wants to be called to repentance. The sinful man doesn't want to hear the truth of God's Word. In the Old Testament days, the Lord God would set apart and send His prophets to speak the truth, calling both the powerful and weak, kings and common people, to repentance. Scripture doesn't speak of any true prophet taking the task upon himself. No. God, Himself, would select and send ordinary unassuming individuals to make Himself, His Word, and His will, known among the people. They were to speak what God gave them to speak. No more. No less. God was with them and through His proclaimed Word, God would accomplish the purposes for which His Word was sent. (cf: Isaiah 55:11)

But speaking the truth of God's Word doesn't always end well for the one sent to preach. Many of God's prophets were put to death for their proclamation. (cf: Mark 12:1–11) The last of these prophets was John the Baptist and Jesus. At the coming of John and Jesus, the Old Testament era had come to an end. John appeared first, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (cf: Mark 1:4) To both the powerful and the weak, John proclaimed:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:2)

In our Gospel text this morning, (cf: Mark 6:14–29) St. Mark presents us with a ***“flashback”*** of sorts. It takes place at some point ***after*** John the Baptist had been put to death and laid in a tomb. In real time, news of Jesus' earthly ministry was spreading, His calling people to repentance, His preaching, teaching, and the many miracles He performed. From our text we read:

“King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.”¹⁵ But others said, “He is Elijah.” And others said, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.”¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.” (Mark 6:14–16)

There were many people in the first century who believed death wasn't the end. Otherwise believing someone could be raised from the dead would be preposterous. But some people thought Jesus was none other than John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others thought He Elijah, or one of the prophets of old. Herod also, knowing that he had John beheaded, believed John was raised from the dead.

Herod was only one man in a family of wicked and ruthless political rulers during the lifetime of Christ. His father, Herod the Great was ruling when Jesus was born. When he received news of Jesus' birth he had all boys age two and under in Bethlehem put to death in attempt to kill the Christ Child to death. (cf: Matthew 2:13–18) The Herod in our text was just as cunning and murderous as his father, Herod the Great. He was the ruler over Galilee and the territories in which Jesus and John the Baptist carried out most of their ministries. When he heard about Jesus, like most of the people, didn't grasp Jesus' true identity.

Unbelief refuses to see Jesus as the Messiah. Unbelief says Jesus has to be someone else. In our text three groups of people believed that Jesus represented the resurrection of some other person in order to escape the truth that Jesus is God's own Son in the flesh of man. This is still true today. People will admit that Jesus lived and walked the earth, however, they'll say He was merely a great teacher and preacher who had some magic tricks up His sleeve – but can't be God.

When Herod hears of Jesus and His preaching and miracles, he cannot forget that he commanded John beheaded. To Herod's guilty conscience, the only person Jesus could be – was John the Baptist raised from the dead. But Herod's guilty conscience really began before John entered the picture because God's Law is written on the hearts of all people. (cf: Romans 2:15)

The backstory is, Herod fell in love Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip. Herod seduced her and then convinced her to divorce Philip and marry him – which she did. When news of the divorce and remarriage got to John the Baptist, he did what all faithful prophets and preachers of God must do: proclaim God's Law in its full sternness, force, and severity – regardless of the position, power, and influence of the person, to powerful kings as well as the weak common person.

The prophet Nathan rebuked David, the most powerful king of Israel, for committing adultery and murdering the woman's husband in attempt to hide the sin, (cf: 2 Samuel 12:1–15) in a rare instance that the king in power listened to the prophet and repented. The prophet Samuel confronted King Saul. (cf: 1 Samuel 13:8–15) The prophet Elijah rebuked King Ahab. (cf: 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1–19; 21:17–24) And in our Old Testament reading today, the prophet Amos spoke out against King Jeroboam. (cf: Amos 7:7–15) Likewise, John the Baptist rebuked Herod saying:

“It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.”¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, (Mark 6:18–19)

Like King Ahab's wife Jezebel wished to hunt Elijah down and put him to death, Herodias wanted John dead. But God's Word proclaimed by John convicted Herod of his sin. John's message perplexed him, yet he enjoyed listening to him. Herod knew John was a righteous and holy man so he kept him safe by throwing him in jail. (cf: Mark 6:20) But an opportunity came on Herod's birthday. (cf: Mark 6:21–22) He gave a huge party for all the high and mighty and powerful people. Herodias's daughter came in and danced, and impressed the likely drunk Herod and his inebriated guests so much that Herod made a rash promise saying:

“Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.” (Mark 6:23)

The daughter asks her mother what she should ask for and Herodias took advantage of the offer and said:

“The head of John the Baptist.” (Mark 6:24)

The daughter was just as ruthless as her mother, because whereas Herodias asked for the head of John the Baptist, the daughter adds a gruesome touch, asking for the head to be given to her on a platter to punctuate her disdain for her step-father Herod. (cf: Mark 6:25)

Herod can't get out of his predicament. He made a promise in front of all his guests. And being weak, shallow, and worried more about saving face in front of his guests, he sends the executioner to bring John's head. He valued his own reputation more than the life of this righteous and holy man. So John gets beheaded. In the end, speaking the truth cost John his life. Certainly, God could've prevented John from being beheaded, just as He could've prevented the deaths of the prophets of old. But like many of the prophets of old, John's tragic death foreshadows what will soon happen to Jesus.

St. Mark writes that:

“... after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14–15)

Jesus didn't take the task of saving mankind from their sins upon Himself. No.

“⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4–5)

The Word became flesh and proclaimed the truth of God's Word to the powerful and the weak, to the tax collectors and ordinary common sinners of every stripe. Like King David after being called to repentance by Nathan, many repented of their sins and trusted God. Others ignored His call to repent and believe. Still others, the scribes and Pharisees and the leaders of the Jews, valued their own power and reputation more than the life of the righteous and Holy Son of God.

Jesus exposed their hypocrisy and pronounced woe upon them for misleading the people. (cf: Matthew 23:1–36) Just like you and me, no one wants to have their sins pointed out to them. No one wants to be called to repentance. Like the prophets of old and John the Baptist, speaking God's truth angered them. They hated Jesus and conspired against Him and plotted how they could put Him to death. (Mark 14:1) When their plans came together, they arrested Jesus, sent Him over to Pilate, the Roman governor, on phony charges. They incited the crowd against Jesus and put the pressure on Pilate to bend to their will. And even though Pilate knew Jesus was an innocent man, he delivered Jesus over for death on the cross, where He would die for your sin, my sin, and the sins of the whole world. (cf: Luke 23:6–25)

Jesus is far more than a prophet. He is the very Son of God. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Him. (cf: John 14:6) Jesus knew He would suffer and die for speaking God's truth, yet He did so willingly. Even though He was oppressed and afflicted, it wasn't until the Lamb of God was led to slaughter on the cross that He no longer

opened His mouth, but was silent. (cf: Isaiah 53:7) He was put to death and laid in a tomb, from where God the Father raised Him from the dead.

Today, your risen and ascended Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus, comes and speaks to you in this place in the Divine Service. His Holy Law testifies that, regardless of whether you're a king or a commoner, you have sinned, broken God's law, and deserve eternal death and damnation. It may be through sexual immorality, like Herod, or by despising God's institution of marriage in divorce, or by having sexual relations outside of marriage. Or maybe your sin is your pride of believing you're much better than other sinners. You bear grudges and harbor unforgiveness in your heart. Whatever your sin – it's no different than Herod's sin, Herodias' sin, Pilate's sin, or the religious leaders who crucified Jesus. Regardless of how great or small you perceive your sin to be, the wages of each and every sin, is eternal death. (cf: Romans 6:23)

Dear brothers and sisters, repent and believe the Gospel. Repent, flee from your unrighteousness and live a God pleasing life. In contrition and repentance, daily drown your old sinful nature and evil desires in baptismal waters and live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Repent and receive Christ's forgiveness of all your sins, regardless of how big or small you perceive them to be. Repent and receive Jesus' very body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith to trust in Him and flee from all unrighteousness. In the words of St. Paul:

"... [God] chose [you] in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that [you] should be holy and blameless before him." (Ephesians 1:4)

"7 In him [you] have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of [y]our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon [you]..." (Ephesians 1:7–8)

"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of [y]our inheritance until [you] acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:13–14)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.