



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Meanwhile, in other news...” **Sermon on Mark 6:14-29**

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Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Before we read our text, having some context will help. In the sixth chapter of Mark's Gospel, we find Jesus being rejected by his hometown. We then discover Jesus sending his disciples out two by two with “No bread, no bag, no money...” They do well, healing and casting out demons. Following the text, we'll read about John the Baptist's head being served on a platter at the King's banquet, and we find Jesus leading his disciples out into the wilderness to be alone, only to find 5,000 hungry people. Welcome to the King's banquet where everyone is fed. But now for other news...

Mark 6: 14-29

King Herod heard of it, 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.”¹⁵But others said, “It is Elijah.” And others said, “It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.”¹⁶But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”

¹⁷For 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. ¹⁸For John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.” ¹⁹And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰for 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. ²¹But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²²When his daughter Herodias 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.” ²³And he solemnly swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.” ²⁴She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask

for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." ²⁵Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Now! Look at what follows. In the next story, Jesus has a banquet, and he feeds the world.

In other news, there was an assassination attempt against former President Donald J. Trump yesterday. The former President is safe but was wounded, one spectator was killed, and two others were critically injured.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump offered condolences for the person killed, and called for unity in the country, and said he looked forward to addressing the nation from the Republican convention in Milwaukee.

In other news, how are you doing?

The news can shake the nervous system. Yesterday was Saturday until it wasn't. It reminds us of how out of control we are. A day can turn on a dime.

Mark's Gospel reminds us of all this. It was a good day! The disciples were going out two-by-two healing and casting out demons. The power to do good in the world and sharing the word of God - it was Good News!

But, as you know, the news turns on a dime. Just like that, we have this awful, sickening story about the birthday party for King Herod. The king's daughter dances before drunk men. And it pleased the King? If you had a daughter, would you want her to do that? It pleased the King.

"Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it!" When you have it all, you can say that. She didn't know what to ask for. What kind of spoiled girl couldn't think of a thing to ask for? And what kind of wicked mother would ask for John's head on a platter? What kind of perverse girl wouldn't give it a second thought? 'Wouldn't you say, "Mom, are you crazy?"' What kind of dysfunctional family is this when the father, the King, obeys such a sickening desire? What kind of people are at this party when a head is brought in on a platter and the band keeps playing and the party parties on?

When crazy becomes normal, it's no longer crazy, it's normal. Mark shows the stark difference between the kingdom of God and the craziness of the world. And it seems to me that Mark wants us to choose where we want to land.

The Good News is that the disciples went two-by-two and they cast out demons and healed the sick. In other news, John the Baptist was killed today. It all happened at a birthday banquet for the King. John's head was cut off and placed on a platter... In other news, Jesus held a banquet and fed the whole world with a little bit of hardly anything.

In other news... where are you going to place your heart and soul? With Jesus in the kingdom... where the demons are disposed of? Where the afflicted are healed? Where the hungry are fed? Or at a dinner party with the King, and John's head on a platter? "Excuse me, is there any more cocktail sauce for the shrimp?" When crazy becomes normal. You don't know what crazy is.

In other news... I heard a yesterday morning a clip on the radio as I was coming into church to conduct a funeral. It was a scientist who was talking about how our minds are so addicted to our phones, saying that "The most popular apps are the ones that keep us flipping and flipping. There's a reason the apps are designed that way. The flipping causes dopamine to surge in our brains." Then he said, "The surge heightens all the more when we run across things that make us angry, more so than things that make us happy. So, it is in the interest of social media and the news media to point us to the things that they know will trigger that response. The longer we're glued to our phones, the more money is made. He said our children are being sucked into a vortex of awfulness. And we may not get them back.

In other news, the FBI identified the shooter as a 20-year-old man from Bethel Park, Pa.

Now in other news, there is Good News. And Good News speaks truth to power.

John the Baptist was one of the best at it. He did something even Jesus didn't do. John the Baptist walked right into the palace and addressed the King's life. "King, it's not lawful to have your brother's wife." That was John. Just let the truth fly!

He's the one who said to his congregation, "You brood of vipers, who told you to flee from the wrath that is to come." Hard to collect the offering after saying that. But John didn't need to take up an offering to keep his ministry going. He ate locusts and wild honey. His wardrobe came off of some dead camel on the side of the road. John wasn't beholding to anyone. He just spoke the truth. "King, it's not lawful to have your brother's wife."

The Gospel of Jesus Christ confronts the crazy. When the demons hear the gospel with Good News, boom – they're gone. It speaks truth to power, and then doesn't hide from the reality of that. Unfortunately, speaking the truth to power will get you killed. "His disciples took John's body and laid it in a tomb." Sound familiar?

But...

And in other news, a tomb is just the beginning of Good News. I mean, you can try to eradicate the truth. And I'm talking about God's truth. You shall love the Lord God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength, and you are to love your neighbor as yourself. And who's my neighbor? Your neighbor is the one that's always on the other side. You can take the truth, cut off its head. You can nail it to a cross. You can bury it deep as a bone. Roll a stone over it. "We're done here."

But the truth always rises, marches on, going from town to town, with nothing. No security detail. No food, no bag, no money! Just a word. And it casts out demons. It heals the sick! Word gets out, and you hear, "Elijah... he's come back, I tell you! "

Some said it was one of the prophets... "Elijah, maybe Elisha. Could be Nathan. Could be Ezekiel."

But the King, the one who served John's head on a platter at his birthday banquet, said, "It is John the Baptist raised from the dead." You can't kill the truth, but you can't kill God's truth. You can be killed by it, but you cannot kill God's truth.

The demons will scream at it, they'll wail. But they're no match for...

Though this world with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.

This is our message!

What it might take for those of us who believe is to bow our heads and pray for the power of the Spirit to come to us one-by-one and then two-by-two. And where two or more are gathered in the name of Jesus, Jesus shows up. And by the power of the resurrection by Almighty God, we pray to be freed from this addiction that says this world has power over us because it does not. It has no power over our children. Dear Lord, save us from ourselves.

And in other news, the body of Christ was raised, and we prepared on this Sunday, 10,000 meals so that the hungry will be fed.

And in other news, the body of Christ is raised, and the storm clouds have broken.

And in other news, the demons are gone. Shut your phone off. Let me tell you, "I love you."

And in other news, Good News!

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