**Sermon Mark 6:14-29 11/7/21**

**Youtube video link:** [**https://youtu.be/XTu79aqFH9Y**](https://youtu.be/XTu79aqFH9Y)

King Herod was also known as Herod the Tetrarch and by the nickname Antipas. He was the son of Herod the Great whose territory was divided between King Herod and his siblings, including his half-brother Herod Archelaus referred to as Philip in our reading today. Herod and his siblings were not independent kings but ruled with the permission and under the direction of the Roman Emperor. After divorcing his first wife, King Herod married Philip’s wife Herodias, which further inflamed an already poor relationship between the brothers leading to a war that was disastrous for Herod.

Into this volatile situation stepped John the Baptist who was calling all the people, including the powerful like Herod and his wife to repent. John pointed out to Herod that his marriage to Philip’s wife was not lawful. People don’t like to have their transgressions pointed out, especially ones that may threaten their power and authority. Herodias’ marriage to Herod had already caused enough trouble and she didn’t take it very well at all. She nursed a grudge against John and wanted him dead.

In response to John’s accusation, Herod arrested him and put him in prison but he didn’t kill him because he was afraid of John. Herod knew he had no legitimate reason to arrest this righteous and holy man. Herod also liked to listen to John, even though was confused by what John told him. You could imagine how threatened Herodias felt that her husband was regularly inviting John to talk with him.

The opportunity came on Herod’s birthday when he offered up to half his kingdom to Herodias’ daughter after she danced for him. The daughter sought her mother’s advice and with up to half the kingdom up for grabs, Herodias tells her daughter to choose something worth more than half the kingdom to her. She tells her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist. How strong and destructive grudges can be. How consuming revenge can be. How many of us have held grudges and desired revenge? Would any of us ever allow a grudge against someone to consume us to such a degree?

When Herod hears that the daughter of Herodias wants John’s head on a platter immediately, he is very distressed. He knows it is wrong to kill an innocent man, a man who is righteous and holy, a man he enjoys spending time with. He knows the right thing to do but he has made a promise and his guests heard him make that promise. Rather than be embarrassed and do the right thing, Herod decides it is more important to save face with his guests and arranges for John’s immediate beheading.

In this account we see the corruption of humanity as the rich and powerful engage in infidelity, harbour grudges, and use their power to silence anyone who would point out their guilt. Arrest and imprisonment are bad enough but revenge goes even further to the point of murder. It all seems so frivolous, for a mere dance an innocent man is killed.

We would hopefully never stoop as low as Herod, but perhaps there have been times in our lives when we have done something we have regretted. Maybe motivated by revenge or anger we have made a rash decision or did something in a moment of weakness that resulted in another person being hurt or harmed in some way. Maybe we too were disturbed by what we did, and we hoped it would go away or that the person we harmed would go away so that we no longer had to face our guilt.

Herod has had his birthday party, Herodias has had her revenge, John is dead and with him his annoying message of repentance. Herod is distressed by what he has done, but surely as time passes everyone will forget John and Herod can put this distasteful episode behind him?

Ah, peace at last!

The problem is that Herod’s peace does not last. Herod can’t forget about John because the message of repentance and turning back to God won’t die. Arrests, threats, even death, cannot stop the spread of God’s reign. Word gets to Herod that now someone else is going around the countryside preaching repentance and liberating people from evil. Some people are saying he is Elijah others that he is a prophet, but Herod is sure it is his worst nightmare. It is John whom he had beheaded raised from the dead. Who could imagine such a thing? You kill someone without mercy or justice and then they rise from the dead! What a horrible thought. Surely such a thing could never happen! Could it?

How do you stop someone who rises from the dead?

Of course, it isn’t John resurrected. The message of repentance and new life has taken on flesh. It is Jesus, the Word made flesh, now walking around preaching and teaching and saving and healing. What is worse for Herod is that the influence of the message is growing. Another dozen people are going around the country in twos also calling people to repentance and bringing life and healing.

What is Herod going to do about this?

An interesting thing is that the beheading of John is a side story in the Gospel of Mark. The infidelity, the holding of grudges, the thirst for revenge, the killing of the innocent, is a side story to the main event. The main event is the coming of the Lord. The main event is John calling out in the wilderness ‘Prepare the way for the Lord.’ The main event is the arrival of the Word made flesh. The main event is the call to repent and turn back to God. The main event is the coming of the kingdom of God and with it release from sin, death, and the devil.

Sometimes when evil is done to us or we see evil done to the innocent and helpless, we can begin to think evil is in control, evil is the victor. It certainly looked like that at Herod’s birthday party. Herod’s wife got what she wanted. Herod abused his power and killed John and it looked like he had gotten away with it. Herod and his wife are symbols of the worst of this world. But the Lord is breaking in upon this broken world and even though Herod may have felt safe in his position of power. Even though at a whim he could kill the messenger of hope, he could not keep the message itself silent.

Eventually, Herod was complicit once again in the murder of an innocent, this time on a cross, but this time Herod’s worst nightmare did come true. The messenger who died on the cross, Jesus, did rise from the dead and that changed everything.

Herod along with all those who abuse power in this world may think they are the main event. The worst of them have and will continue to commit atrocities. We are broken people living in a broken world, but the writing is on the wall and the time for sin and evil is coming to an end. The resurrection of Christ shows us that no matter how pervasive and powerful evil may appear to be, Christ is the main event. The message of repentance and forgiveness, new life and hope cannot be silenced and will be the final word, now and forever. **Amen.**

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz