

Proper 10 B
July 15th, 2018
St, Mark 6:14-29
St. George's Episcopal Church
Fr. Chris

Words And Promises

“The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother.”

Be careful what you promise. Be very careful with your words. His daughter Herodias heard the promise of Herod: “And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom."

Herod was only trying to please. The motives of his promise were good. He had no intention of harming John the Baptist, nor did he suspect that Herodias would ask for the head of John on a platter. He just wanted to give a nice reward to the young woman who had danced for him, who happened to also be his daughter.

Herod would have liked that advice if he could have heard it. However, Herod spoke expansively, promising more than he should have and he did so because he did not consider first the consequences of his words and promises. There is a lesson here for us. He intended good. He wanted to reward Herodias. The learning is this: Trying to be a nice guy or gal sometimes says more about your need to please, rather than doing what is the right thing to do. This is why Herod was so upset by the request of Herodias. [Tradition names the girl, the daughter of Herod, as Salome]

Being a nice guy or gal is a laudable pursuit, but only if that niceness and kindness has an altruistic basis. That is, we ought to do nice things for the sake of the action itself, not what reward it might bring upon us. If I am nice to someone because I want him or her or others to think I am a nice person, then I am looking for a reward from them. Therefore, my actions are far from altruistic. They are self-serving. When you look for no reward either in heaven above or on earth below, then your motives are pure. [See Psalm 24:4...”Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who have not pledged themselves to falsehood, nor sworn by what is a fraud.”] The kindness is for kindness's sake. There are no brownie points with God

for doing good deeds. Why do them then, you ask? Simply it is because the reward is great inside of you. The feeling is indescribable. We were commanded to love others as we have been loved. It doesn't say 'love others so you can redeem your rewards in heaven.' We are to use Jesus as a model of this kindness. He gave us a new commandment during the Last Supper, "to do to one another as I have done to you," when he washed the feet of the disciples. Who is greatest among you, if that even matters? Remember the words and example of Jesus: "I am among you as one who serves." And so we are to serve one another, expecting nothing in return, other than the satisfaction you feel inside you.

Back to Herod. He knew that he should decline the request of Herodias, because it was so wrong and hideous. On hearing the request of Herodias, Herod responded in this way: "The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her." He ultimately was more worried about what his guests would think if he broke the oath he swore publically before them, rather than doing the right thing.

Is an oath, a promise, more important than doing the right thing and pursuing the higher moral ground? Yes, it is very important to keep your word and your promises. Breaking a promise, especially publically made, is a betrayal, a lie, and a major diminishing of your trustworthiness. Who will trust you anymore after you break a vow or promise? And really, should anyone trust you? Would God have any reason to believe you after you have broken vows made to God? There are your Baptismal promises made to God. There are the vows you made in marriage at the altar, that is, if you are married. Breaking these publically made vows and promises should give us great pause and should deeply grieve our hearts if we do so. [See the bottom of page 423 in the Book of Common Prayer] This is why the marriage ceremony text says 'marriage should not be entered into lightly!' Any promises we make should be very carefully considered and weighed.

Consider carefully the advice and words of the Apostle James, when he writes: [James 5:12] "Above all, my beloved, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "Yes" be yes and your "No" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation."

The words of James are for careful consideration here. We should make few promises other than those to God. This is because there may be unseen or undesired consequences to our promises as Herod found out. And such promises may cause a moral quandary between keeping a vow and doing the right thing. I believe the latter always takes precedence. We should always do the most loving

thing, even if it destroys what other people may think of us. And thereby, we may be presented with some of the most difficult decisions to sort out and act upon.

Herod had married Herodias, his brother Philip's wife and John had challenged him about the morality of this. Not surprisingly, Herodias was less than a fan of John the Baptist, that is, John the prophet who spoke truth to power: "And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for 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."

The words and lament of Jesus in the Gospels take on special meaning in this context: [Luke 13:34] "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

Herod knew in his heart what the right thing to do was in this circumstance. We always know in our hearts. You must set aside all personal considerations. Sometimes doing the right thing is very hard, but once you do it, you can live with a clear conscience instead of multiple regrets the rest of your life. AMEN