**SUNDAY 7/11/21**

**SERMON**

**MARK 6:14-29**

Five-year-old Emily was usually a happy little girl.

But one day she had been playing outside, and suddenly ran into the house,

          tears streaming down her face, crying as though her heart would break.

Mom quickly gathered Emily into her arms and asked:

“What's wrong? Are you hurt?”

"Not me!     My doll!      Billy broke it!" she sobbed.

Mom was surprised.

Billy was usually a caring big brother to Emily.

"What happened? How did he break it?" Mom asked.

“I hit him over the head with it, and it broke into pieces.”

We humans are very good at blaming others for what we have done.

King Herod had similar problems.

Herod respected John the Baptist, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man.

Herod listened attentively when John spoke, keenly interested in his words of truth.

Although he refused to submit to the Lord's will,

          Herod was interested in the preaching of the wilderness preacher.

When Herod heard John, he was greatly perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him.

He sent some of his men to arrest John.

They bound him, and put him in prison.

Herod was actually protecting John by keeping him in prison.

His wife, Herodias had a grudge against John, and wanted to kill him.

As long as he remained locked up in the prison,

          she was unable to arrange his death.

Then King Herod's birthday arrived,

          and he arranged a spectacular banquet to celebrate.

He invited the courtiers and officers and the leaders of Galilee.

Everything was going well.

His young step-daughter danced to entertain the guests.

To honor her, King Herod offered to give the girl anything she wanted,

          even half of his kingdom.

Actually this oath which Herod solemnly swore,

          was not something he was obligated to fulfill.

Herod was simply boasting when he said:

“Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.”

Herod just did not have the power to give away parts of his kingdom,

          but saying such a thing would impress his guests.

When his step daughter asked for the head of John,

          Herod did not have to say yes;

          He could have said no.

As much as he might have feared the ridicule, or laughter, of his cronies

          for not keeping the hasty vow,

          he did not want to lose face in front of his guests.

Herod regretted offering such a reward,

          and was very sorrowful regarding her request,

          but he would not deny it in front of such a gathering.

So he ordered the death of John.

He sacrificed the time he enjoyed with John,

          hoping to appear generous to his step-daughter.

Knowing it was wrong, Herod commanded the execution of John

          to be carried out immediately,

          and his head was brought on a platter, and delivered to the young girl.

Our own pride and arrogance cause a lot of trouble in our lives.

Little Emily would not admit she was the one who broke her precious doll.

She put the blame on her brother.

Herod did not want to take back his vow in the presence of his guests.

So John the Baptizer was killed.

And Herodias won that battle.

It is not always easy to follow God's commands and directions.

However, blaming others, and trying to find excuses for our own behavior,

          doesn't work well either.

God sees through our twisting of the facts.

John the Baptist's story reminds us that being a Christian will not always be easy.

There will be tough decisions to make

          which might lead us to be unpopular, laughed at, or ridiculed.

And so we constantly have to decide:

          Do we take the time to seek out God's directions,

          Or, do we go our own way, and end up causing more problems?

AMEN