**7/14/24**

**All or Nothing**

**Mark 6:14-29**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Today’s Gospel Reading starts out with people trying to figure out who exactly Jesus was. They even assumed that he might be John the Baptist raised from the dead. However, Herod was quick to cancel this thought, as he cleared the air and verified that the death of John was at his hands. When we listen to the account of how John was killed, I can imagine that we all might feel uncomfortable, angry, or perhaps even frustrated, and quite frankly I am sure that we might even been confused too. Just the imagery alone of John the Baptist’s head on a platter makes me uncomfortable no matter how many times I have read it, and if it had you squirming in your seats a little bit then that is completely normal. Then, when you add in the account of the events leading up to it, and let alone the foolishness that occurred, it can have all of us feeling angry or frustrated as well. To top it all off, I am sure we are all asking ourselves why this story was sandwiched right in the middle of two very different accounts that quite frankly had nothing to do with what was being told in the story line.

Well, we know that all the accounts in the Bible are actually told and documented by normal people just like you and I. The way the books are written is so similar to the way we all think at times. These writers got focused on something, and then all of a sudden, their minds trailed off to some other random thought or occurrence just like your mind and mine do at times. Heck, even if you happen to watch animals it happens to them too. For instance, a dog can be focused on going to get a drink or some food from his bowl, and then all of a sudden see a squirrel out of the corner of his eye. That dog then goes running full force on at the squirrel, but the dog was so caught up in the moment that he has simply forgotten that he is actually inside the house. Bang! The dog ends up running right into the sliding glass door. Then, after the dog shakes his head and unscrambles his brains a bit, the dog actually forgot what he was even doing in the first place before that pesky squirrel came into sight. Through this very example, and the times we can think back about ourselves, we come to realize why this thought may have just needed to get out before the writer could move on. It was the proverbial squirrel of distraction. However, this was just no ordinary squirrel and no ordinary distraction. It was vital to go back to Mark chapter 1, verse 14, and complete the story following the arrest of John the Baptist in the first place. This story could not just simply be forgotten or pushed aside. So, that is why this story was sandwiched into the Gospel of Mark here. With that in mind, with respect to the very importance of this story, we are not going to miss this moment to review it together even though it seems so cruel, uncomfortable, frustrating, and quite frankly disgusting.

Now, if you think about it, we actually come to realize that even in our own lives there are moments that make us feel good or proud. Then, of course there are those other moments that leave us shaking our heads at ourselves and wishing they would have never occurred. Those proud stories make us feel good, and we may share them a few times. However, those stories that we wish would never be remembered, and those stories that we question our very own motives and actions at those points in time could probably be blotted out if you ask us most times. Then, as if our embarrassing or frustrating stories are not enough of course we definitely wish that some stories in the Bible were never even documented for us to have to review so many years later either. However, we are reminded that things happen for a purpose, and they are not erased just because we feel like it. We are reminded that we need to learn from them no matter how uncomfortable, angry, or frustrated that they might make us feel. We also need to grow from them, and even find some reassurance in them.

Through this very story we come to realize others have taken a stand for their faith and what is right in the past. Just like we all have done so many times before, I am sure. Now, we are still here to experience the Gospel Reading today, but there are those who are not. Just like John the Baptist, they unfortunately were the very example that makes a lot of us uncomfortable with the ministry that we are called to. Bad things happen to good people because this world is not the final resting place folks! This world is our ministry field, and it is our battle ground. Through faith in action the very ministry and memory of folks like John the Baptist live on forever. They remind us to keep on keeping on when our faith might be wavering, when someone gets mad at us for sharing, or when we are just worrying because we are out there sharing the message and we do not feel it is even making an impact. We are reminded that God has us here on earth, and God is always by our side. Furthermore, God has us forever, and God is with us when we focus on the truth despite the consequences.

We are even reminded in Mark chapter 1, verse 3, that John played such a vital role in the overall story as he not only prepared the way of the Lord in death, but in life as well. If you really think about it then you come to realize that this very Gospel Reading was foreshadowing of what was to come in the death of Jesus at the hands of Pilate. So many stories in the Bible are told in different ways so we can hear them and they can actually sink in. The master storyteller is at work folks! Parables and stories are exactly what the Great Physician prescribes for our continued understanding, growth, healing, and restoration.

Alright, I admittedly have hit you with a lot in a short amount of time here. Maybe some of you are questioning what this is all about, and maybe some of you are hoping that I manage to reel it back in and refocus. With that being said we get the second part of verse 20 that says so much, the King “was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.” (2) The King actually had a fond respect and love for John, and hearing about this Jesus and his disciples walking about he may have had some flashbacks here. These very flashbacks are why we got the entire story too. We got to hear that despite knowing he was doing wrong, and listening to John the Baptist, he still kept going on with life as normal. This led to him falling into yet an even further trap when a young girl danced at a birthday party and impressed all of the guests. This young girl struggled with making a decision on her own, for the story does not tell us that she was probably around 12 years of age, and she did what any young person would do, and she asked her mother what she should do with the prize rewarded to her from the King. Now, you tell me that the mother did not have the long game in mind here. She was going to get back at John the Baptist in one way or another for telling her and her husband, who happens to be the King in our story, that they were married incorrectly and living life wrongly. This is where I go back to exactly what it says at the end of verse 20, that the King “was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.” (2) Foolishness and the lack of a backbone would rule the day. He made a promise to this young girl that danced, and he did not want to go back on it in front of all these other important people despite knowing better. So, despite liking and respecting John, let alone protecting him in his jail in the first place, it would end up being John who paid for his misdeeds with his life. John the Baptist would end up being martyred and end up suffering at the hands of those opposed to the gospel. However, the King and the mother of the daughter would end up suffering over the rest of their life if you read into the story much deeper.

Then, if you think about it, or even admit it, we unfortunately exhibit the very same perspective on things in life because we are greatly perplexed; and yet we like to listen to him. The him I am speaking of here folks is God. A little different him than John the Baptist and the King in our story here, but in context our God is there whispering in our ear. God is reminding us that we know right from wrong, but sometimes we feel that wrong can be oh so much more tempting and satisfying. We often even forget that a strand of our wrongs adds up, or ends up becoming so bad that we can eventually lose everything. We need not be perplexed, and we need to actually listen and heed what we hear and learn for God as it is being imparted to protect us from not being able to live an everlasting with him in his kingdom. Our very Salvation is hinged upon us hearing, heeding, following, believing, and acting accordingly by living our lives and doing what is right. “It's all or nothing, regardless of the consequences.” (5)

 That is the very blessing of the message. That is the very blessing and grace provided to us each and every day. We learned that when John told the truth and stood by it, he was reassured that God was with him despite the consequences. John the Baptist was out there in the mission field led by God in the very ministry he was conducting. He knew that people would not like or even be comfortable with what he had to say or teach them. However, he had a conviction, and knew that people needed to hear these things in order to be able to change and grow, and to be able to live life fully. John was not merely acting on his own accord either. He was acting through and with the very backing of the Advocate. The Holy Spirit was right by his side as he was paving the way for Jesus, and though he might not have been perfect, he set an example we can all follow. He also paved the very way for the perfect example which was Jesus here on this earth. Talk about a pretty important role John the Baptist had to play here.

I want to remind you that all of our lives on this ball of mud are temporary, and they may be cut short at any moment for any number of reasons. That may be including the very fact that we are willing to stand up and stand out for our faith, and we might not back down despite the very worst that may happen. The good thing is that we have the blessed reassurance that when we tell the truth and stand by it, we are reassured that God will be with us despite the consequences.

I quite frankly am not very comfortable with my head possibly being served up on a platter someday. However, for the very purpose of salvation I would like to say that when the going gets tough, and when I might be suffering at the hands of those opposed to the gospel, that I will stand up for my faith and I will stand up for my God. I am hopeful that you and I will not end up like the other people in the story, and we do not get angry or frustrated with ourselves and our actions when things come down to it. I am hopeful that we do not end up ashamed and end up being regretful because we were too proud or wanted to temporarily feel good that we discarded what we knew was right. It is my hope that we all come to realize that God is always by our side. Let us not allow our story to be confused with those of others, and let our story stand out even in the middle of other stories. There is a reason that John the Baptist’s followers came back for his body despite how risky it may have been. The last verse is not just a throw away verse here folks. There is vital importance in the fact that they claimed John’s body and provided a proper burial for it was an outward sign of respect for John, his ministry, and the mission he was committed to.

There is a very distinct reason I continue to thank you every week for being here in person or on the conference call. It is very evident that we need each other. We need to provide support and encouragement to one another, and even a gentle nudge sometimes to go in the right direction, or to even just simply get back on track. I am hopeful that our continued banding together in community makes us come to the very realization that “Our affirmation of and allegiance to the truth of the Gospel cannot be a hedge position. It’s all or nothing, regardless of the consequences.” (5)

Amen and Amen.

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year B 2024

 July 14th, 2024

 8th Sunday After Pentecost

(2) Bible.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

 Copyright 2018

 Abingdon Press

(4) WorkingPreacher.org

 Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

 If there’s a hint of good news surrounding John’s death, it resides in his followers

 who refuse to be intimidated

 July 14, 2024

 Commentary on Mark 6:14-29

 Matt Skinner

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

 Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

 Today’s text is probably one of the best known birthday party stories ever!

 July 12, 2009

 Commentary on Mark 6:14-29

 Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman

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 Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

 The report of John’s death was the end of innocence for Jesus’ mission

 July 11, 2021

 Commentary on Mark 6:14-29

 Emerson Powery

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 Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

 The preacher of this text for this Sunday’s sermon receives my congratulations for

 originality and guts.

 July 12, 2015

 Commentary on Mark 6:14-29

 C. Clifton Black

(8) SermonCentral.com

 "Giving In To Pressure"

 Contributed by Tim Zingale on Jul 10, 2006

 Scripture: Mark 6:14-29

 Denomination: Lutheran

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 John The Baptizer's Death Series

 Contributed by Garth Wehrfritz- Hanson on Jul 4, 2003

 Scripture: Mark 6:14-29

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Mark 6:14-29 (NRSV)**

 As Jesus and his disciples begin to attract attention, Mark recalls the story of

 John the Baptist’s martyrdom. Like John, Jesus and his disciples will also suffer

 at the hands of those opposed to the gospel of salvation.

 14 King Herod heard of [the disciples’ preaching,] 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.” 15 But others said, “It is

 Elijah.” And others said, “It 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.”

 17 For 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. 18 For John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have

 your brother’s wife.” 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to

 kill him. But she could not, 20 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. 21 But an opportunity came

 when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for

 the leaders of Galilee. 22 When 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.” 23 And he solemnly swore to her, “Whatever you ask

 me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.” 24 She went out and said to her

 mother, “What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer.”

 25 Immediately 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.” 26 The king was deeply

 grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to

 refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to

 bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 brought his head

 on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When

 his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

**Theme Statement: What is God doing in or behind this text?**

**(Active verb, saving or empowering action, complete thought, and a simple short sentence)**

God is with us when we focus on the truth despite the consequences.

**Four Page Method**

**Page One (Trouble in the Text) (Characters Only)**

The King was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.

**Page Two (Trouble in the World) (Us Only)**

We are greatly perplexed; and yet we like to listen to him.

**Page Three (Grace in the Text) (God & Characters)**

When John told the truth and stood by it, he was reassured that God was with him despite the consequences.

**Page Four (Grace in the World) (God & Us)**

When we tell the truth and stand by it, we are reassured that God will be with us despite the consequences.

**Sermon Unity Elements: The Tiny Dog Now Is Mine**

**Text (41-42):** Mark 6:14-29

**Theme (42-48):** Suffering at the hands of those opposed to the gospel.

**Doctrine (48-50):** Salvation

**Need (50-52):** God is always by our side

**Image (52-56):** John the Baptist’s head on a platter

**Mission (56-57):** “It’s all or nothing, regardless of the consequences.” (5)