

Sermon Proper 10 2018

July 15, 2018

Mark 6:14-29

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

Sin always recoils under the light of God's Word. We see it once again in our lessons this morning. To start look at the prophet Amos. Now here is Amos, a shepherd, as he tells us, a man of no particular note apart from the fact that the Lord came to him and told, "Amos, you will be a prophet." He said to him, "**Go, prophesy to my people Israel.**" And what was he to prophesy? He was to tell them of their sin. He was to tell them that this Promised Land in which they lived, this Promised Land would be the land from which they would be exiled. And think about how serious that was. After all, who had promised the land to them? The Lord Himself. He had promised to Abraham as we talked about a couple of weeks ago, that this land would be the land of inheritance for his descendants. This was the land which they were given after they had been freed from the bondage of Pharaoh, the land that God led them toward in the midst of the forty years in the wilderness, the land that Joshua led them into as they crossed through the waters of the Jordan River. This wasn't just the land that their dads had obtained in a good land barter. No. This was the gift from God Himself. And so when Amos is telling Jeroboam the news, what happens? Amaziah tells Jeroboam what Amos is saying, and tells Amos he better get out. In other words we see the push against the prophet for the word that he spoke, the word from God, the Word that is a light to the world. And yet what happened? Sin recoiled under that light. The darkness of that sin reviled the light that would expose it.

And we see it with John too, don't we? Here John, the prophet, comes to Herod and he tells him that this sin he's committed is unacceptable. He comes with the light of God's Word, and what happens to him? Sin recoils under it. And consider what fortitude it took on John's part to do this. There is the king, the king partaking in the very visible and public act—because marriage is just that visible and public—but partaking in marriage with his brother's wife. His brother, by the way, who must still have been living. So this public act got the public rebuke. And think about that. Yes John certainly had clout in God's eyes. Here John was the prophet. The Eschatological Prophet, the prophet bringing in the end of time and introducing

the Messiah. John knew that. The Lord knew that, and we see that Herod even in knew it in a sense. But in worldly terms, who was John? Just a weird guy who preached in the wilderness in his wild outfit of camel's hair and his less than trendy diet of locusts and wild honey. And yet, in the boldness and authority of God's Word, what did John do? The lowly man preached to the king. And what happened? Sin recoiled under the light of God's Word.

Sure Herod liked John alright. He was perplexed by him, but liked to keep him around for entertainment. But there was Herodias. She couldn't handle it. This Word hit her heart like a knife. It pricked her conscience like a balloon stretched to its limit. She hated to hear of her sin, and she wanted to silence the one speaking it. As Mark tells us, "**Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death.**" And when push came to shove, who did Herod side with? Herodias, because sin recoils at the light of God's Word.

We see the same thing in our day, don't we? Thankfully, we don't have to worry a great deal right now that as the Church speaks the light of God's Words, the piercing scalpel of the law to this world, we don't have to worry that we'll be cast into prison. Our kings are still protecting our freedom. But sin recoils doesn't it? When we talk about what God's law says there is backlash. When a Christian defends marriage as God has defined it, there are people losing their livelihoods for such social faux pas. Or look at the defense of the unborn. There are so many not wanting to hear that either. In particular, look at the backlash of people at the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. And I don't bring this up to be political. I bring it up strictly in relation to defending the life of the unborn against abortion. To that point I have read articles stating that Brett Kavanaugh should give us hope that Roe v. Wade will be overturned, and I have read articles that say that Brett Kavanaugh will not overturn Roe v. Wade because he cares too much for precedent that is already set. In others words, it is not clear what Kavanaugh is actually going to do about abortion. And yet there are those clamoring and protesting because they are terrified that Kavanaugh is going to take away abortion, or even access to birth control. Doth they protest too much? It seems to me that as we see these reactions to the protection God gives to life, or to the honor God gives to marriage and there is the reaction that we are seeing in our lessons. Sin recoils under the light of God's Word. The consciences of people are pricked at this word and they don't like it, so they push and kick against it.

Of course, as I say this, we always have to be careful as the Church. Certainly, we should understand that we have a duty to confess this word to our world. Certainly we have the duty to speak the light into the darkness. But we also have the duty to recognize the darkness within our own hearts. We have the duty make sure that we turn that light around and point it at ourselves just as intensely. We have to look at ourselves and say, “Yes, I have to defend the unborn, but where am I not upholding life as I should. Yes, I am called to confess that God has made us male and female that a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his one wife such that the two will become one flesh, but where do I dishonor marriage.” We have to make sure that as we look at the eyes of the world, we are acknowledging and removing the planks in our own. And just as the case is with the world, our sin will recoil at the light of God’s Word.

In fact, look at how Herod responds to hearing Jesus’ preaching. Maybe I’m reading something into this that isn’t there, but I think we get some insight in Herod with his response when news comes to him about Jesus preaching and healing those around him. Look at what he says: “**John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.**” I read that and I picture the guilty murderer of a horror movie haunted by the ghost of the man he has killed. I picture his face turning white and his blood running cold. He’s scared. “I did this to John, and what’s going to happen to me? My sin is going to come back and I’ll pay for what I’ve done.” That is how our sin always responds. It’s scared. It’s like a cockroach that flees from the light when you turn it on.

Of course, in this case we know that John wasn’t raised from the dead. We know that this isn’t the ghost of the Baptist back from the netherworld to haunt his unjust murderer. No. We know who this One preaching is. This One is greater than the Baptist. This One is God in the flesh of Man. This One is not only the perfect Prophet, but the perfect Priest, and the True King. And why is that important?

It’s important because as that perfect Prophet, He receives the treatment of the prophets, but not just murdered like the prophets before Him. No, He is mocked, tortured, jarred, and crucified, dying for the very sins of those murdering Him. He is nailed to the cross for the sins of the whole world. Then He is raised from the dead, not to avenge His death, but to bring the greatest light of all: victory over death, victory in the forgiveness of sins, victory over the captor, the devil.

Yes, just as John was seized and imprisoned by Herod, we are all seized and imprisoned under the darkness of sin, the darkness of that sin that recoils under the

light of God's Word. And yet Jesus' resurrection has broken that bondage, and now we are free. Now we liberated to dwell in the light.

And as I say that I think there are two important things for us to draw from that. First of all, we should know this for sure. In the epistle lesson, Paul speaks some wonderful words of comfort to us. To summarize, it says that it's God's purpose for us to receive that joy of life in His forgiveness. And we know this because the Holy Spirit is given to us as a deposit when we believe. By faith, the Holy Spirit dwells in you and is your deposit guaranteeing what God will give you eternally. Like earnest money, you know that the rest is coming. The One who gave you the deposit doesn't lie and has infinite credit in His account. And how do you know you have that deposit? Well, where does He give you faith? In the Gospel. In the Word of what Jesus has done for you, dying and rising again. In the waters of baptism, where you received the promised Spirit, as Peter said on the day of Pentecost. And in the Supper where Jesus gives you His very own body and blood. In those faith is given, faith is nourished, faith is increased. And in that faith the Holy Spirit dwells in you, giving you freedom. That's the first thing, you can know this.

Second this liberation gives us freedom from that darkness, freedom to know that we can confess this light in this dark world, and even if people around us persecute us, as Luther says in a Mighty Fortress, ultimately the devil and the world "can harm us none." Even if they take our lives "the victory has been won, the Kingdom ours remaineth." They can't take away our joy of eternity with our Lord Jesus, our Lord Jesus who will wipe away our every tear. As perilous as this life is, His victory is eternal security for us. Furthermore, this gives us a freedom to acknowledge our own darkness. Sin recoils at the light of God's Word, but in the light of the resurrection it disappears. As we bring our own sin to light, it is given the treatment of being forgiven in the blood of the Lamb. And in that it loses its power. The devil loses his ability to bind us, to seize us, to keep us captive. Now, we live in that light in joy.

So Christians, does sin recoil at the light of God's Word? Yes, but Jesus' resurrection has brought you into that light, so that you no longer recoil, but live in the freedom and the joy of that light. Just like John, you live in the comfort that even should you be arrested and die, you have the One whose healing has come and freed you for an eternity of joy in His Kingdom. Amen.