### “Righteousness and Peace Will Kiss” July 15, 2018

**Psalm 85:10–11**

10 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
11 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. . . . 13 Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

**Ephesians 1:8–10**

With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

**Mark 6:14–29**

16But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”

20Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. . . . 24She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer”. . . . 28 they brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl.

What struck me was the great contrast between these readings, especially between the cheerful psalm and the tragic Gospel reading.

The details of the Gospel story are grotesque and dramatic, but the underlying reality—the decadent self-indulgence and violence of powerful people—is drearily familiar, from ancient times to the present day.

John, Jesus’ cousin and predecessor, has been arrested because of his condemnation of Herod’s marriage to his brother’s ex-wife, but if it hadn’t been *that* issue, it would have been something else. John was too uncompromising, too morally firm, to forever remain off the radar of a powerful and corrupt person like Herod.

Herod was not really a king but more like a local warlord who became a tetrarch under the Romans, serving to collect taxes and keep security for the Romans, who maintained an army in Syria but not in Jewish territories. Legally, Herod did not have the right to impose the death penalty. Only the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, had that legal authority, but the Romans don’t seem to have cared when Herod killed a few people. More corruption.

Evil in high places brought about the killing of both John and Jesus. The Sadducees, the priests, are going to orchestrate the killing of Jesus, getting Pilate to impose the death penalty. And yet, the New Testament tells us, God and Jesus are the true victors. The First letter of John says “whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith” (1 John 5:4).

In other words, spiritual power is greater than material power. Spiritual power is discerned by us mostly in the form of supreme values: love, truth, beauty, goodness, unity.

And this is where I am led to the psalm, which describes love, righteousness, and other spiritual realities, agreeing with each other.

It is expressed in poetic language, and its meaning might not be clear. I want to unpack the unusual expression, “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (85:10). This is poetic imagery meant to say that all the supreme values, all the attributes of God, work together.

In the material world, it seems that worthy values can sometimes work against each other. Truth-telling might work against respectfulness. Compassion might seem to recommend something different than justice does. In the limited and finite life we live here, these conflicts do happen.

But on the divine level, there is no real conflict. Righteousness and peace “kiss,” that is, they work together in perfect harmony. Faithfulness and love “meet” (85:10), that is, they function together.

If people honestly seek the will of God, and allow themselves to be corrected and changed, they will not keep plunging into conflict. Outward conflicts are usually the reflection of inward conflicts. The Epistle of James says that “envy and selfish[ness]” lead to disorder, and conflicts “come from your cravings that are at war within you” (3:16; 4:1). Spiritually disordered people create disorder around them. They also can bring suffering and death upon innocent people, although they cannot sever the eternal connection with God that faithful people have.

When we think of all this evil, we may be tempted to anxiety, fear, or anger, but we can resist those emotional temptations if we affirm that righteousness and peace kiss, that God’s faithfulness and truth are unassailable.

Then we are moved to pity those people who are unfortunate enough to be conflicted and angry, like out-of-control children. They end up hurting *themselves*: “The wicked are snared in the work of their own hands” (Ps 9:16). Herod ended up getting snared in political intrigue, and he and Herodias were banished to Gaul in the year 39, never to be heard from again. Pilate also was demoted and shamed.

For ourselves, we have to remember to not respond to things that try to trigger our anxiety, fear, or anger. Watch out for these triggers, for things that hook you. Keep some truth statements nearby at all times, to remind yourself of spiritual power. Compose yourself, with truths.

Spiritual sayings have *real spiritual power*, sayings such as this one from Zechariah: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts” (Zech 4:6). Or our psalm: “Faithfulness will spring up from the ground” (85:11). Or the Ephesians passage about God’s “will . . . set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:9–10). Jesus is gathering up all the good the human race has, and *will* have. The will of God *will prevail* on this world. Truth will *out*. Hold on to the promises; keep them close. Remember that faith conquers the world.