

St Marc Grenoble  
Sunday 11th July 2021 (Trinity 6)  
Ephesians 1: 3 - 14  
Mark 6: 14 - 29  
**'God or Man?'**

**PRAY**

I wonder what you think about this morning's Gospel reading?

**Is anyone prepared to share their thoughts about it??**

It is rather startling, isn't it?

The first comment to make, is that this is the **ONLY** story in Mark's Gospel, which doesn't focus directly on Jesus.

But, it does have something to teach us about the potential risks of being disciples of Jesus. This story reminds us that sharing the Gospel doesn't always evoke a warm response; rather, it often sharpens the opposition's attack.

Some Bible scholars suggest that telling this story was part of Mark's way of preparing his readers for the shock of reading about Jesus' crucifixion.

As I read through the story, I was reminded of Matthew 16: 13 - 16, and Luke 9: 18 - 20, where Jesus asked His disciples (His followers / apprentices) "Who do people say that I am??"

**Do you remember what the responses were??**

... 'John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah or one of the prophets'; but Peter, when asked, replied: 'You're the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!'

So, let's get back to today's story. News (and Gossip) travels fast!

These days, of course, we have mobile phones and social media, which means that news - especially bad news, and gossip, travels faster than ever.

But, it's not a new phenomenon. The shape and style of communities, and the ways news travels may have changed; but the desire to know and keep up with gossip, what's going on in the world around us, has never changed!

News about Herod's adulterous marriage, and John's challenges of it, will have spread like wildfire.

And, in the same way, news about all Jesus was doing and saying as He travelled around Judea and Galilee: His amazing teaching, and wondrous healing miracles, spread like wildfire; 'King' Herod - soon heard all about it.

Herod was not really a king at all; he was a collaborator with the Romans, who'd appointed him as 'Tetrarch' in the region of Galilee and Perea - and he was widely hated because of his collaboration with the Romans.

It seems the news about Jesus' teaching and miraculous healings opened a deep wound of guilt for Herod – his foolish actions and, possibly, regret about his lack of resolve over his wife's desire to do away with John the Baptist, led him to fear that John had come back to haunt him, as he may have deserved

But, in many ways, this morning's Gospel story is rather 'back to front'. Let's 'go back to the beginning': Herod Antipas ruled Judea for the Romans; he was a 'puppet king' and very ambitious.

Many Jewish people really hated him, and definitely didn't regard him as their 'real king'. They were waiting for 'Messiah', who'd kick out the Romans and restore Jewish sovereignty once and for all.

Some people had thought that John the Baptist was the Messiah they were waiting for – but he preached a call to repentance and baptism in preparation for 'one coming after me' - who is Messiah

And so Jesus came, preaching a Gospel of 'justice' and 'love', which was certainly not what the Judean people were expecting, or hoping for.

Herod had been fascinated by John; and by what he had to say. It seems Herod had a sneaky regard for John, possibly because John was one of the few people who was brave enough to speak out, and challenge him with the truth about his adulterous marriage.

It was because John said Herod's marriage to Herodias (his brother's former wife) was adulterous, that she hated John, and she had waited a long time for an opportunity to have him killed. Her chance came unexpectedly.

Herod held a wild party to celebrate his birthday; he and his guests were obviously 'well oiled'. Herodias's daughter danced an erotic dance for the king, in front of his guests; their response was so good, that Herod rashly offered to give her a gift, whatever she wanted – up to half of his kingdom!

The girl was overwhelmed and unsure what to ask for; and consulted her mother. – This was the chance Herodias had been waiting for! The girl asked; Herod wavered, but didn't want to lose face in front of his guests, or his wife; and John lost his head!

We're told Herod was 'greatly distressed'; but his need to save his pride in front of his guests, and his arrogance, sealed John the Baptist's fate.

Once again, evil appeared to triumph over good!

But this episode didn't sit easily with Herod – even though his desire to save face had outweighed his willingness to honour his relationship with John. He was obviously left with a lot of residual misgiving, or guilt!!

So, later, when he heard news of Jesus' preaching, and His many healing miracles, it opened the old wound. The crowds saw Jesus as Elijah, or one of the prophets, but Herod could only see Him as John the Baptist, whom he thought had returned, to haunt him.

So, we come back to the beginning of today's Gospel story: **I wonder if anyone can tell me what immediately preceded today's passage??**

Yes, we were told that Jesus had sent out the disciples in twos, with authority over unclean spirits; and that they cast out demons and cured many people. I'm sure that made Herod very uneasy!

There's also little doubt that Mark was using this passage to draw parallels between John the Baptist and Jesus; and, paradoxically, between Herod and Pilate. But, it demonstrates why Herod viewed Jesus with fear too.

Quite apart from the sad and gruesome story about the death of John the Baptist, this passage should really challenge us, as it did Herod, to consider our response to Jesus.

We've heard all the stories of Jesus' redemptive ministry, and the healings.

**How will we respond?** With fear, guilt and regret like Herod?

Or are we, like the disciples, willing to change our ways, to repent and be redeemed - and sent out, to work faithfully proclaiming the Good News of Messiah, casting out demons and curing the sick, in the name of Jesus?

Despite the warning given to us, by what happened to John, about the dangers of following Jesus in a secular, materialistic and selfish society.

Resentment, persecution, even the threat of death may never be too far away from those who reach out in His Name.

Who do we trust, God or man? We must choose. Will you respond in faith??

As I close now, let's pray, and ask the Holy Spirit to empower us to follow the disciples and go out, without fear, into our community, in Jesus' Name ...