

**Sermon Notes – July 14, 2024**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Mark 6: 14-29**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Speaking the Truth in Difficult Times”**

My scholarly perspective notes: the message of John the Baptizer's beheading becomes proclamation, because the storyteller embedded it within a larger narrative. As a self-contained story, it offers a bit of hope, primarily to those who, like John, are so committed to what God is doing in the world that they are willing to die for their beliefs. But the hope really comes because party celebrating Herod on his birthday is measured against the plumb line of all that God is doing in and around Jesus in the rest of Mark's story. Jesus' words and deeds show what reality looks like when God's will is done.

Placing the generative and generous Jesus-story alongside this gruesome birthday party exposes the crookedness of the way that every powerful system rules the world. John and Jesus speak truth to power; the powerful say what is most convenient at the time.

Herod creates a dysfunctional family. Jesus gathers a family who does the will of God.

Jesus blesses the children; the royals manipulate a young girl.

Jesus lays a hand of blessing on children's heads. Herod puts a decapitated head in a child's hands.

Jesus gathers the lost multitudes and feeds them with bread; Herod gathers his friends and serves up a head on a platter.

Jesus brings life and healing day after day; Herod's system deals out death daily.

Herod consolidates his power; Jesus has shared his power with the disciples.

The story of the disciples doing ministry is wrapped around this story. They have gone out and proclaimed that people should turn around and embrace the Good News. Their message is very close to what John first preached, a message Jesus in turn carried forward. We should also note that their preaching resonates with the word Amos delivers. They push back the demonic forces and heal those who are broken. Their practice is shaped by God's Anointed One, Jesus; their journey also stands in contrast to Herod and his way of violent suppression.

Mark has strategically placed this remembered story of martyrdom in the middle of this gospel. We hear it not when it happened in the flow of history, but as a memory interrupting the flow of Jesus' ministry. Herod assesses whether he

will need to deal with this Jesus and His movements in the way he dealt with John. A warning is offered to those who follow Jesus; the commitment you are making will change the world, but you may pay a high price for your faithfulness.

Following the way of the historical man Jesus was demanding, men and women committed themselves to that path in hope. How much more should this be the case when the faithful confess Him as present before the foundation of the world, as the revelation of God's mystery, as the source of our destiny and inheritance - as the letter to the Ephesians claims?