

Pastor Jon's Sermon from July 14, 2024 based on Mark 6:14-29

“What does the beheading of John the Baptist have to do with us?”

When does our faith move from simply hearing about Jesus to becoming a doer for Jesus? When does it go beyond curiosity about Jesus, to becoming the foundation of our life and the ethical decisions we make?

Is the good news of Jesus just something nice to hear in church once a week, or does it move us to a place of hunger and thirst for justice in our homes, communities, country and world?

In Mark, 6:14-16, King Herod is worried when he hears about Jesus being proclaimed in his territory. He is concerned that John the Baptist, the one whom he had beheaded earlier in the Gospel, had been raised from the dead. He should be worried, because Jesus is the Alpha and Omega. The beginning and the end. Jesus has come to stamp out evil and make all things new. He will come again to fulfill his kingdom. You see, earlier, King Herod

Herod had John arrested because John spoke out against King Herod for taking his brother's wife to be his own. John spoke truth to power and paid for it. Herod's new wife, Herodias, held a grudge against John and wanted him dead, but she couldn't act on it.

You see, Herod feared John the Baptist. He knew he was a righteous and holy man and protected him... for a while, at least. He liked to go and listen to John speak the truth to him in prison. Mark tells us John's words greatly perplexed Herod.

But when the rubber meets the road, Herod fell pray to the human condition at his birthday party. I'm guessing some libations were probably poured. Then Herod paraded his daughter of the same name as her mother, Herodias, out in front of the guests to dance. An honorable man would never allow a female family member to perform such a display. Also, it was shameful for a man to get drunk on the sensuality of a woman in public, much less his daughter. All the guests and Herod liked the dance so much, Herod made a public oath to his daughter. “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it”. She went to her mom, the one with the grudge against John, and came

back and asked for John's head on a platter. Herod relented and gave in to her request. Because of the public oath Herod made, he was honor bound to keep his word. Had he not done so, his officers would no longer have trusted him.

Herod opted for upholding his public image over doing the right thing. Sounds like what happened to Jesus on the cross with Pontius Pilate's passivity in dealing with him.

Debi Thomas in her lectionary blog, Journey with Jesus, asks some convicting questions regarding this text: Do I care too much about what other people think of me? Do I value my status, reputation, and popularity more than I do the truth?

Can you relate to these questions? I'm afraid I don't speak up when I should and remain silent when I should speak up. Am I too concerned about keeping my job

What can we learn from the failure of King Herod? He liked listening to John speak. He had a curious fascination with John's teaching. But that's about it. He did not stand up for justice when the chips were down. He chose likability over credibility.

I once heard, the gospel of Jesus should comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

Debi Thomas leans into this with more questions for us to consider:

When I choose silence for the sake of convenience, whose life becomes expendable? When I decide that justice is too messy, chaotic, or costly for me to pursue, who suffers in the long term? Whose vulnerability do I depend on and benefit from to keep my own comforts intact?

We will get this wrong. We don't always do the right thing. Thank God for grace and the cross. Hopefully this sermon gets you to things about how your faith can become active in love... not just something to rely on when its convenient, but letting it become the fabric of your life.

Even Jesus concludes in sermon on the mount in Matthew 7:24 about moving from a hearer to a doer. "Everyone who hears these words of

mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock.” Everyone who hears these words and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.”

Will you join me in building your house on a rock? Amen