

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

CONNECTED TO THE KINGDOM

Mark 6:14-29

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Analysis by Paul Jaster

14King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." 15But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

17For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. 18For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 20for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. 21But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. 22When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." 23And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." 24She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." 25Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John

the Baptist on a platter.” 26The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, 28brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. 29When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb

DIAGNOSIS: Severed from the Kingdom

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Haunted by One’s Past*

Cold sweat must have dripped down the back of Herod Antipas when he heard of the ministry done in the name of Jesus. Some said that Jesus was Elijah or a prophet, like of old. But Herod’s guilty conscience forced Herod to an even more dreadful conclusion: “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.” What a chilling thought! A tyrant’s ultimate power is death—putting to death one’s foes. Take that away and there goes the tyrant’s power.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Begrudging*

The reason Herod killed John was because Herod and his second wife had a grudge against him. John (speaking for God) was critical of their unlawful marriage. Similarly, we also want to silence and remove anyone who is critical of us. We have a murderous heart that wants to kill them, even though normally the law and our conscience restrain us. And what happened to John happens to Jesus. John is the forerunner of Jesus in both his ministry and in his death. We begrudging ones want to crucify and silence Jesus because that “repent” word (which he shares with John the Baptist) is critical of us. Just think of

how many unlawful things we have done. Or, how often we have reneged on promises because a more attractive offer comes along. We would rather go our crooked way than God's straight way. And we begrudge anyone who tells us different, including Jesus.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Cut off from the Kingdom*

While Herod's fear of John's popularity holds his grudge in check, Herod is bound to have John decapitated by his reckless oath. Ultimately, the same thing happens to Herod. Not literally, but politically. Herod loses his kingdom (being the head of the country) due to his affair with Herodias. The two are exiled by the Romans. And both vanish from history. Worse still, neither of them get in or benefit from the kingdom of God which Jesus came to bring. As the head steward of the people, Herod should have been a leader of the Jesus movement on the front line. Instead he is cut off from the body of Christ. And without being connected to the body of Christ, one dies eternally, forever. It is just as Jesus predicts in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants in Mark 12:1-12: The owner of the vineyard (God) destroys the tenants (faithless political and religious leaders) and gives the vineyard (kingdom) to others.

PROGNOSIS: Connected to the Kingdom

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Raised from the Dead, the Head Stone*

But Herod has it wrong. Jesus is not John the Baptist raised from dead. Nor is he a prophet like of old. Rather, he is the beloved son of the owner (God). And through his death and resurrection, "the stone that the builders rejected has become the keystone," the head stone, the crucial stone in a great arch of law and gospel that holds everything together. [In fact, some picture the Crossings Model as this arch with the tip of the arch pointing down to the grave and then up like a death and

resurrection.] In Jesus, all the great promises of the prophets are fulfilled. God is faithful to his first love, his wayward people. With the resurrection of Jesus the power of tyrants is defeated, starting with that tyrant Death. And just as John said, the kingdom (marked by the forgiveness of sins, the ministry of the gospel, resurrection from the dead, the giving of the Spirit) has drawn near. The Stronger One (Jesus) has come. And we get in on this kingdom through our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. Via that life-long immersion and the Spirit which it gives, we become members of the body of Christ and heirs to the kingdom. We are connected to the key, the head, the cornerstone.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Beneficent*

Those who are connected to Christ's kingdom become, not begrudging, but beneficent. Their concern is not just for the high and mighty. Or, for the young, cute, seductive, hip-swinging chicks who might please them. But, rather for all, including the poor and lowly. (John the Baptist's concern over Herod's marriage was not only that it was unlawful. Rather, John also foresaw the inevitable, devastating impact on the people of the land, when Aretas, the king of neighboring Nabatea and the father of Herod's ex-wife, would come to take revenge for Herod's insult to his daughter's honor as he eventually did. Our greedy, begrudging choices rob from the poor and lead to battles among the rich.) Our grace-full choices lead to a great benefit for everyone including the poor and lowly. This is the "Mission of the Twelve" (Mark 6:6b-13), which is the "it" that triggers Herod's recollection of his dastardly deed. The "Mission of the Twelve" is our mission, too. And this is "it"! It's what our life is all about.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Celebrating Christ's Past, Present & Future*

Herod offered the daughter of Herodias up to half of his

kingdom. Which was already just a small fraction of his father's original kingdom. But Jesus offers us the whole thing. As Martin Luther says in his greatest hymn, "The kingdom's ours, forever." And oddly enough we celebrate the kingdom (Christ's past, present, and future) by taking the "head" of the church, Jesus, and serving him upon a platter. Or, at least, upon a paten. The celebration of Holy Communion celebrates (A) his past, his natales, his birthing from the grave (B) his presence with us now in word, bath & meal, and (C) his promising future. And it says that we are connected to everything he says and does. This is the "dance," the party, the celebration that pleases God the most.