

July 15, 2018

Grace and Glory Lutheran Church; Pastor Ken Albright

Text: Mark 6:14-

Theme: Contrasting Feasts

Two different, oppositional forces.

That is what leapt off the page at me this week when I read this story in Mark chapter 6.

One a dark story about the beheading of a good and righteous man. A prophet who had held up a plumb line to Herod and showed him how he was falling short. And more than that, it is an illustrative commentary on the realities of a world turned in on itself.

Yes, John the Baptist spoke truth to the adulterous relationship between Herod and his brother's wife, Herodias.

We see the see that relationship disintegrate before our eyes when John holds up the mirror to the inappropriate nature of it. You see, Herod and Herodias ditched their spouses, and Herod married his brother's wife. See, you thought your family was crazy!

Herodias wanted to rid herself of John the Baptist once and for all, so she could live her life on her terms... and she finally got her chance.

She used her own daughter as a pawn...enlisted her to dance for Herod and his guests at his own Birthday Party-- in a way that put Herod under a lustful spell ending up with him promising that young woman the world in front of his guests. And then, for the sake of appearances, not willing to go back on his boasting before his guests, he brutally exterminated the life of someone he secretly admired.

We see also the dark realities of a **soldier carrying out an order** without question of its ethics. For if he will not do the job, it will be his head on the platter, and another will be plopped down in his place who will, without question obey orders.

As James Taylor sings about the realities of the world in his song “You’ve got a friend”, he pines about the damage people can do to one another in relationships...***“they’ll hurt you, and desert you. They’ll take your soul if you let them, oh but don’t you let them.”***

In contrast to this sad, stark picture of the world, we see **another story**, a competing reality **at work** in with and under the complexities of the other.

What has drawn notice is that Jesus, and those he sends out into the surrounding areas, are creating a buzz. Healing people. Calling people to an about face in their relationship with their God. Casting out evil and helping people find wholeness in every sense of the word.

And that, my friends is a threatening prospect to the insecure.

Herod was fraught with fear—he thought Jesus was the ghost of John the Baptist coming back for revenge.

But revenge never is part of Jesus’ game.

Agape Love is. Friendship is. Protecting children is. Honoring the marriage vows is. Giving bread and cakes to the poor is. Teaching our hearts to dance before the Lord is his strategic plan.

Today in the Old Testament reading we see the story of David bringing the Ark of the Covenant back from the hills of Philistine to place it at Jerusalem, which will become Israel’s center and the place of worship.

And it becomes celebratory worship. And we see David dancing before the Lord with all his heart. This leader of leaders in Israel’s history—broken though he is—David loved the Lord.

The wonderful image there is of feeding. When he finished making offerings to the Lord, he blessed the people, and he sent them all home with food for their families—breads, meats, raisins. What an image of the feast that is ours in God’s presence. What an image of a leader caring for his people. What a contrast to the Herod’s party.

Surely this week we have seen the contrasts in light and darkness played out in the news. Whether we get it by one of the big three, or Twitter, or Facebook we

have seen images that our minds have soaked up. Some images of evil, others of goodness. Let me tell you about one of the good ones.

Perhaps you saw images of grateful young Thai soccer players. Who, when sitting in a cave, and then sitting up in their hospital beds conveyed the same gratitude for all those rooting for them; all those praying, all those cooperating, all those diving, all those who were a part of the plan to bring them out of the cave safely and provide for their medical attention. Gratitude.

All those Buddhists, all those Christians, all this Muslims, all those school children and Grandparents, and soccer coaches and Navy Seals all over the world—for them their hands pointed up beneath their chins.

Gratitude. Solidarity. Humanity.

Oh, that image was fire-branded into my heart this week. Oh, I feasted on that image this week. I bet you did too.

Every Sunday we are invited to an alternative party. In contrast to the warped world of Herod's party, we are invited to the feast of our Lord Jesus. Whose body was also sacrificed. But who rose again to feed us on it from week to week.

To give us strength as we stand up to the forces of evil.

To give us courage for the facing of this hour.

To give us faith with which to feed our daughters and sons.

To give us joy to dance before the Lord.

Jesus himself is our bread, our meat, our raisin cake. Jesus sends us home from this place contented, so that we may share the fruits of eternal life with those who hunger, with those who are weary and warring with their own kin.

There's more than one party out there, my friends. I'm glad you came to this one today. Amen.