

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY JULY 14, 2024

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“The Plot Thickens”

Based on Mark 6:4-29

Herod was convinced he had seen a ghost. He had killed the prophet John the Baptist once, and it looked like he was going to have to do it again! Except it wasn't a ghost the king had been told of, but the man named Jesus instead. For Herod, though, the dark secret of how John the Baptist had lost his head began to replay in his mind.

In the early days before Jesus' ministry had taking hold, many thought that John the Baptist was in fact, the Saviour they had been waiting for. He preached, he healed, and he had a following of disciples all to himself. John was a bold and brash young man, who spoke plainly with authority, which got him into trouble much faster than his cousin.

There seemed to be some fishy business going on in the palace, and John the Baptist was quick to draw public attention to the bad smell. Herod had married his sister-in-law after her husband conveniently died, a real no-

no of the day. And if this little bit of gossip sounds similar to the story of David and Bathsheba, then you would be in good company with the Bible Study crew this past week, who came to the conclusion that far too many husbands were conveniently dying in order to clear the path for a King to a new Queen.

But things get fishier. Herod was both fascinated and repulsed by John.

- Fascinated by the intellectual and theological conversations.
- Horrified, at the same time that John knew a few of the dirty secrets of the palace.

But while Herod seemed willing to toy with John in prison, his wife, Herodias was consumed with revenge towards John.

Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. (v18)

One does wonder why her rage simmered as it did. What secrets was she hiding?

About her dead husband?

About the lineage of her daughter?

About her taste for untouchable men? (Oooo, did I really say that?!?)

And so the plot thickened. Herodias bided her time, and waited for a moment when her husband would not be able to back down without publicly shaming himself. She didn't have to wait long. And then she pounced.

Herod hosted a dinner party for all the local politicians, influencers, and well-to-do; the see-and-be-seen crowd. There was wine, and good food, and entertainment. In fact, one very special dancer, a one daughter who became a pawn to both parents.

- Some versions say she was Herodias' daughter.
- Some versions say she was Herod's.
- And she might have belonged to both,
- Then again, maybe she didn't really belong to either?

But the sad case is that both the King and the Queen used her for their own gain.

- Herod paraded her around the room full of important men like prize to be bartered for.

- Herodias fed her information to gain her own revenge.
- And one prophet lost his head as a result.

And so, it was that John the Baptist's life was cut short. A bit of a foreshadowing of the coming end for most of the disciples, sometime down the road. And a similar story for many of the faithful down through the ages who have stood their ground and remained steadfast to their faith in life and death circumstance.

I'm sure that when the brutal cause and effect of the death of John had been placated with a few glasses of fortified wine, Herod had been able to convince himself that he was not responsible for the outcome on that evening. I myself, wonder what happened to the girl?

And a few days after that Herod likely forgot about the whole business altogether. That is, until word began to filter into the palace that:

- Someone who spoke very much like John,
- Whose message was very similar to John,
- And whose propensity to speak the truth bluntly was very similar to John, was roaming the countryside, just like John to growing crowds, gaining popularity by the hour.

We call him Jesus. Herod likely called him a ghost; a return of dark memories better left in the shadows. The truth, which had been forced into dark spaces was lifted back into the light in the name and ministry of Jesus, and it brought fear into the heart of the king. Not just the truth of the events of that horrible night, but bigger truths.

- Of love.
- Of mercy and compassion.
- Of sin and forgiveness.
- Of grace and eternity.

What brought fear to Herod, brings us joy. Herod's attempt to quell the light failed. God's message of light prevailed and could not be stopped, even by a brutal death.

Friends, this is our Good News. Death on a cross could not stop The Light. A brutal death from plotting and scheming behind the curtains could not stop The Light. That Light is our light. It could not be stopped then. It cannot be stopped now. And no matter how bad things seem to get, in the secret places of our lives, in our communities, in our church, or in our global community.

Know this. God's love cannot be stopped.

The Light cannot be extinguished.

- It may flicker.
- It may be dimmed for a time.
- It may need to be protected from the gusts of shame and darkness that try to blow it out.

But God's love cannot be stopped. It simply finds another way.

And that is the greatest hope to hold close in these complicated days. God cannot be stopped. Love will win in the end. We must prevail. We must persuade. We must persevere. We are the people who will share that light to the next:
 Who comes next
 What comes next
 However it comes,
 what is to come next.

God is love. And His love will overcome all. Thanks to be God.