

Scripture Readings and Sermon

July 11, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Mark 6:14-29 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The story of John the Baptist seems at first odd given the narrative of Jesus and his disciples. John the Baptist is often used as a pointer to some truth about Jesus in the other gospels. In Mark, however, the focus is not on John but on Herod. While Jesus' hometown rejects Jesus, Herod responds to the power of Jesus if a bit confused as to its source. The guilt of Herod's actions causes Herod to attribute the power of Jesus to John the Baptist rather than God. Even before his death, John attracted Herod who would go to the prison to listen to John. This attraction infuriated Herod's wife much as David's wife was upset by David's dancing. Mark then flips the story of Esther upside down. In the Book of Esther, Esther so tempts the king that he says "It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." (Esther 5:3) Esther, urged by her uncle, then uses the king's weakness to reveal a plot against the Jewish people which leads to the death of Haman. When Herod makes the same pledge to his step-daughter, she, urged by her mother, asks for John's head.

Mark 6:26 The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her.

When have you said something without considering the consequences?

What if we lived in a time when your word was a binding contract?

Would we be more careful with our spoken and written words?

In a time when even people in positions of authority are not held to their word, do our words have any value?

What does this mean for wedding vows, baptism/confirmation vows, or even prayers?

Even if we don't value words, does that mean that God does not take us at our word?

Commentary on Ephesians 1:3-14 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

In traditional Paul fashion, these eleven verses are actually six run-on sentences. At times, it is easier to understand Paul if you rewrite the sentence and indent after every comma to see the pattern of Paul's argument. After the opening welcome, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", Paul makes three points: we are blessed, we are chosen, and we are called to holiness. The following sentences make reference to the first two points. Paul repeatedly uses the phrase "good pleasure" and grace to indicate that we are blessed. This blessing, however, only exists "in Christ" or "in the Beloved". This is one of the keys to Paul's theology. It is only in, through, and with Christ that we receive God's blessing. How do we get "into" Christ? Through hearing "the word of truth/the gospel of your salvation" and believing. Once we are "in Christ", we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This is our "inheritance". For Paul, those who receive the gospel are the "chosen", "destined", "adopted", or "children through Jesus Christ". Over the centuries, this has been interpreted in three basic ways: the chosen is the church, the chosen are all believers, and the chosen are those predestined. Focusing on the belief that Jesus died for "all", Methodists have traditionally emphasized all believers. These believers are then called to live a life of holiness made possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance

What does an "inheritance" mean?

Is an inheritance simply a gift from a previous generation or is there also a responsibility?

Does an inheritance carry with it an obligation to leave an inheritance to the next generation?

And does an inheritance also mean that the previous generation should be honored?

If inheritance carries obligations, what does our Christian inheritance mean?
Are we not indebted to Christ and all the saints?
Are we not obligated to hand that message to the next generation?

Commentary on 2 Samuel 6:12b-19 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Much has been written concerning David's "linen ephod" and how his near nakedness shamed Michal who felt such displays were beneath a king and the husband of a king's daughter. The story, however, must be taken in the context of the ark and not the ephod. The ark was both a passive and active symbol of God's blessings or curses. Possession of the ark did not mean power. When the Philistines captured the ark in 1 Samuel 4 and moved it to their cities, the LORD cursed their cities (1 Samuel 5:1-12). When the ark was returned to Israel, the descendants of Jeconiah refused to rejoice and seventy men died by the hand of the LORD. (1 Samuel 6:19). After the capture of the fortress city of Jerusalem, David decided to move the ark from the "house of Abinadab" where it stayed after the Philistines returned it (1 Samuel 7:1). David, however, did not inquire of the LORD so that when Uzzah was killed during transport for stabilizing the ark when an oxen shook it, David was reminded of the LORD's power. He left it at the house of Obed-edom and waited for a sign from God. When God began to bless the house where the ark rested, David took that as permission to bring the ark to Jerusalem. Remembering Jeconiah and Uzzah, David did not hold back with the rejoicing and festivities. The ephod was an act of humility and vulnerability before the power of the LORD.

2 Samuel 6:14 David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod.

If the ark is the vessel that held the Word of God, is not Christ our ark?
If the ark contains the power to build up or tear down, is not Christ our ark?
If Christ is our ark, how do we celebrate his presence?
Is worship a time for rejoicing or a solemn dignified event that Michal would approve?
If David is ready to be a fool before the ark, are we ready to be a fool for Christ?
Do you dance for Christ or for the world in your daily life? Whose opinion matters?

Sermon "Free Will: Your Choice"

Law without free will is tyranny and love without free will is slavery. Out of God's sovereign power, humanity was given free will to respond to God's grace. The problem is that we often misuse that free will. Like Herod, we often make promises, say, or do things without thinking about the possible consequences. As king, Herod's word was legally binding. A king (or any authority) whose word cannot be trusted soon loses that authority. Whether it was alcohol or lust, Herod's promise to his step-daughter was a bad choice. The guilt of Herod's decision haunted him as reflected in Herod's belief that Jesus was in some form the spirit of John the Baptist whom he killed. Why is it that we continually misuse our free will to harm ourselves or others.

Imagine Jesus' story of the prodigal son ended differently. Finding himself among the pigs, instead of deciding to return home the prodigal son stayed. He may have doubted his own worthiness or his father's mercy but either way he stayed in the pigsty. With each generation, the stories of this father's house fade into memory and the life in the foreign land becomes their reality. This life was not their inheritance or their real home but they had forgotten who they were. This is what sin has done to humanity. We believe the pigsty of our world is our home and our reality. The truth is that we are children of God destined to live in our Father's house. Every single human is a child of God for not one was made outside of God's good creation. The problem is that we have let sin shape our choices and our perception of reality. Even when the stories of faith are shared, the actual reality that we have better choices often seems like a child's dream. Jesus, however, came to show us that those choices are real even when the world threatens us and kills us. The resurrection is proof that God is always the

right choice.

We have been given that Holy Spirit to guide us into making better choices. When the world presents us with impossible choices like the leaders testing Jesus, the Holy Spirit reveals a better choice. We can only see that choice if our eyes have been opened in prayer. It takes humility and a daily surrendering of “Not my will but Thy will be done”. Choices, at first made by faith, soon reveal a more abundant life than we could have thought possible given the choices presented by the world. That abundant life brings peace and joy into our lives even in the midst of suffering. It is this “peace that surpasses all understanding” that makes us want to dance before the LORD. When the presence of God represented by the ark came into Jerusalem, David danced with abandon. According to the custom of the day, he made a fool of himself as seen in the reaction of his wife. David, however, did not care about the view of the world or the “appropriate” choices for a king but rather danced in the Spirit to the joy of his Father.

We have been given the awesome gift of free will. Whether we use that gift to find a truly rich and abundant life of love or we use that gift for selfish and self destructive means relies on who we turn to when we seek guidance. The world will always give us choices that benefit the world. God gives us a choice that benefits all of us. As children of God, let us learn from Herod and David and seek the Holy Spirit to guide our free will.