

Tuesday, March 14, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 18

Matthew 14:1–12

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus,² and he said to his attendants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

³ Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife,⁴ for John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.”⁵ Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

⁶ On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much⁷ that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.”⁹ The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted¹⁰ and had John beheaded in the prison.¹¹ His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother.¹² John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

Reflection

We suddenly find that Jesus has not just caught the local religious leadership’s interest. Herod—the son of king Herod who killed the babies at Jesus’s birth—also is paying attention to the person of Jesus and his ministry. He too has a theory as to who this person is. Once more, the shadow of the cross falls on our story: Jesus and John are associated once again and then we hear of John’s death.

We notice that the Law has not been ‘thrown out’ with the coming of Jesus. John is able to confront Herod over marrying the divorced wife of his brother Philip. This clearly goes against God’s commandments, and as a Jewish ruler (although the prohibition applies to all under the Law) he should not be doing it. This leads to John’s arrest, imprisonment and eventual death.

Herod wants to silence the prophet, since he cannot refute him (he cannot argue that it is Lawful). He wants to kill him, but he doesn’t because he is afraid of the reaction of the people who view John as a prophet. Herod’s main responsibility is to maintain the peace—rioting is bad for his political career. Herod makes a rash oath to his daughter-in-law, never imagining that what a young girl might want is murder. And, while he still doesn’t want to kill John for political reasons, he must for political reasons—he can’t lose face (power) in front of important guests. This is a ruler who is ruled by everything except righteousness (what God requires of his rulers) and he provides a perfect foil to Jesus’s own rulership as he has compassion on the peoples and feeds them in the next section.

This story acts as a two-edged sword for us disciples. On the one hand, we are reminded about the cost of discipleship. We are called to stand up for God’s truth—*without grasping for the levers of the world’s power*—which puts us at odds with a world that doesn’t want to hear it. Because the world doesn’t want to hear it, they will seek to silence the voice of the church. This is why we are called to take up our crosses to follow Jesus. On the other hand, we are reminded of how not to think and behave. We cannot be guided by the wisdom of the world. Scripture—*read through the lens of Jesus and his cross and resurrection*—informs us how we are to live in this world. There does exist truth and we may know it if we will have eyes to see and ears to hear. The truth of Scripture is the only guide that will lead us into life, even if obedience leads us into death.

Prayer

Lord, we confess that we are uncomfortable being an odd people. We want to be liked and respected. We want to appear wise and even worldly. But, we have heard your call to be cruciformed. Would you give us the courage to bear Christ-like witness in our word and deeds, and make us read to endure what comes. Amen.