

## A Reflection from Revd Jane for Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2021 ~ Trinity 6

This story in Mark is not an easy story to read, but there are three things I want us to think about from it. The first one is the constant question that Mark asks - Who is Jesus? Who do you think he is?

As we read this gospel we see how the lives of John, Jesus and Herod are intertwined. This is not the Herod (Herod the Great) who had the babies in Bethlehem killed, nor is it the Herod who had threatened Joseph and his family when they had looked to return from Egypt. This is Herod Antipas the tetrach who ruled over Galilee. He was a son of Herod the Great and he was not really a king. Perhaps it was the popular title that was used but more likely it was used by Mark to show the difference between one who liked to be known as king and the one who was not just a king but the King of kings. These three people's lives were inextricably linked but Jesus was always the key, the one at the centre.

John, at the start of Mark's gospel was the messenger who prepared the way for Jesus. He preached a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. Herod had him arrested because he courageously told Herod that what he had done in marrying Herodias, his brother's wife, was wrong. Once John had been arrested and murdered by Herod, it was Jesus who took up the message about himself - 'repent and believe the good news that the Kingdom of God is here'. When Herod himself heard all that Jesus was doing, he thought John had been resurrected. Later on of course, Herod is also involved in Jesus' death - this time Jesus truly will be resurrected.

Herod questions - who is this Jesus? The people questioned - who is Jesus? Mark says to us - who is Jesus? As I have said before we too need to know the answer to this question and then let it change our lives.

The second thing is regarding those who have already made a decision about the question - who is Jesus? Mark puts the story of John's murder in the middle of the disciples being sent out on mission and then returning to Jesus afterwards to tell him all they had done and taught. Mark is making it clear that to all who answer the question of who Jesus is, and who set their hearts on following him, there is a cost. There is a cost to discipleship. Wonderful things had been done by the disciples in the name of Jesus, but the voice of the one who had been sent to declare his coming had been silenced.

Much, if not all of the writing in the New Testament was written during times of fierce persecution - this was the daily reality for all who chose to follow Jesus. Mark is saying there is a cost to following Jesus and life won't be easy but it is never about the rewards the world can bring. Instead, he says, it is all about Jesus and what he has won for us through his own death and sufferings. Herod, Herodias and the others gathered in the palace were committed to living for themselves. Is it any different to many today? Coming with a message of repentance and the need to change their lives it is clear to see the significant opposition they faced and that we too can face, as we stand for the things of God in this world.

Yet, if we had read the Psalm today it would have been Psalm 24; and if we were to read the 3 Psalms from Psalm 22 to Psalm 24 we would see the journey Jesus made from the cross to the crown. There is a cost to following Jesus, just as there was a cost for Jesus, but if we are willing to lay our life down for Jesus then glory follows - and it is all to His glory. Fling wide the gates of our hearts, the gates of our lives that the King of glory may come in! Amen, so be it!

And the third thing is this. I wonder if any of you have made a rash promise that you later come to regret? Perhaps you promised your children, or a partner, or a friend, something that later you

wished you hadn't said. As we read this story of Herod we can see how a rash promise, made in haste, had huge consequences.

Herod got himself pushed into a corner. He was a powerful man but, enthralled by his new wife's daughter, he got himself trapped in a stupid promise. John the Baptist had rebuked Herod for what he had done in marrying his brother's wife. Herodias the new wife hated John for it and looked for an opportunity to have John done away with, and she used the opportunity that Herod gave her by his thoughtless promise - and his pride.

People promise all kinds of things. We see it in all walks of life. Politicians promise and say all kinds of things. Rash promises said in the heat of the moment, but here we see the difference between the one who said he was king and the One who is the King of kings. There is One whose promises are true and he is faithful to watch over them and see their fulfillment. His name is Jesus!

2 Corinthians 1: 20 says, 'For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Every promise that God has made has been met in Jesus. Every promise. Not some, not a few - EVERY. Yes, there is a cost to discipleship and we need to know that, our lives won't necessarily be easy, but it is nothing in comparison to what has been given us, what has been won for us.

We see this so clearly spelt out here in Ephesians - a picture of how the Church should truly be, of how we should live our lives. In the Greek this passage is one long continuous sentence - one long celebration of the One who is blessed and who has blessed us with every blessing - not some, or a few but EVERY blessing. The blessings begin with him and resound to his glory in this wonderful anthem of praise.

Our lives can be difficult - God never promised us easy lives - and sometimes we can feel overwhelmed by things. For most people these last 16 months have been difficult, some have felt overwhelmed by it all and now, as we start to emerge from lockdown, others feel overwhelmed by the feeling of needing to pick up their lives again, feel fearful about meeting others and being with people. But, in the midst of all these things, and all the other things we face, God is with us. 'Be still', he says, 'and know that I am God' (Psalm 46: 10). God holds us in the palm of his hand. Our name is written on that palm. He is always with us. His promises are faithful and true.

My satnav has a re-centre button. When I move the map on too far or when I start to lose my way, I can push the re-centre button and it puts me back on course. We need to re-centre on Jesus, to have him at the centre of our lives, to have him at the centre of our church life and to keep him at the centre.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.