

Pentecost 6, 2009  
Good Hope Lutheran Church  
Mark 6: 14 – 29

We are again this day in the Gospel lesson, found this week in Mark chapter 6. What we have here in this lesson is a rather lengthy digression—by that I mean, the Gospel takes a break in telling the story of Jesus, to let us know what finally happened to that interesting fellow from earlier on, the one named John the Baptist. The death of John the Baptist is before us today; and let us begin with prayer.

Lord Jesus we thank you for your servants of every place and time, all those who have lived their lives faithful to you in word and deed, and who now rest from their labors. For John the Baptist, and other martyrs; for heroic saints and bold believers; for the quiet witness of our parents and grandparents and Sunday School teachers, and all others who have shared the faith with us—thank you for them Jesus, and let us in our way be every bit as faithful to you as they always were. Jesus in your name we pray, AMEN.

John the Baptist—you remember him. Kind of hard to forget him—kind of hard to forget a guy who liked eating locusts dipped in wild honey, and whose shaggy way of dressing in camel skin clothing was just this side of Neanderthal. John the Baptist was unforgettable in a lot of ways, and if you were King Herod and Queen Herodias, what really stuck in your mind about John, was the way he preached.

John you recall was the one who stood by the Jordan River, proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sin. John didn't care who you were—he was no respecter of persons, that's for sure—if you came to John and even if you didn't, he was going to be very blunt about the sin in your life. You

want to be forgiven by God? said John. You want what the Lord has promised to those who believe, you want *eternal life*; you want His blessings, you want your messed up personal world started all over again and your messed up family rescued from whatever trouble it's in, well then listen said John. Stop kidding yourselves. Admit the fact, that 99% of the problems in your life, are of your own making. Not your husband not your wife not your parents not your boss not the economy not the unfairness of it all—99% of the problems in your life you bring on yourself, you do, because of your sin. Look in the mirror. Admit to God what He already knows, about your pride and your greed and anger and lust and whatever else, then humbly seek His mercy. Repentance—Lord please forgive me.

Repentance—Lord please change me, Lord make me new! Repentance—Lord, rescue me, not by pushing some make believe Easy Button. But by the long hard work of me outgrowing sin, and by your grace Lord, growing into your image and likeness each and every day.

That was the message of John the Baptist, and it still needs to be heard today. Well, King Herod. He had a boatload of problems. And, like you like me like everybody else, he'd brought most of them on himself. Herod had an affair with his brother's wife, her name was Herodias. Just as an aside, they weren't always real creative with names back then—there were four or five

guys running around all named Herod, and then this gal Herodias—can't keep score without a program. Anyway, Herod and Herodias had an affair, there were a couple of divorces to pave the way for them to get married. And it kind of goes from there; nothing new under the sun, as the Bible says. And John denounced the affair. John publicly called the king and queen to repentance. They didn't like that, and matters came to a head so to speak in today's story, where Salome dances, and the head of John the Baptist ends up on a platter.

For being faithful to God and the truth of his faith, John lost his head, literally—he died a martyr's death. What I'd like to point out—and what I'd like to focus on in the little time I have remaining—John wasn't the only one to lose his head here. In a manner of speaking, so did Herod, so did Herodias. Herod saw a girl dancing at his birthday party. “She pleased him.” He lost his head, he said and did outrageous things without stopping to think about what was right and good, without bothering to wonder about the consequences. Herod lusted in his heart, and in the end kind of, lost his head. Herodias meanwhile had never stopped being angry at John for daring to preach honestly about sin, there was no lust in *her* heart. Only anger, only resentment, and it consumed her, it consumed her heart till she also lost her head, and arranged John's death.

Now you may never literally lose your head, the way John the Baptist did. But every one of us has lost our heads, the way Herod and Herodias did. Sin starts in the heart—a lustful glance, a greedy thought, an angry moment. It starts there, *and we let it stay!* We don't confront it, we harbor it; we don't deal with it, we nurse it along. Till it starts to consume us, and we too lose our heads—saying and doing the kinds of things, that haunt us the rest of our lives. Sin always starts small, and if we don't confront it then how can we later? What happens, when you lose your head? Anything you're proud of now? Or only things, you'd give anything to take back.

Here's the key. You're going to lose your heart and your head anyway, you know that by now. So lose them to Jesus! Hello!—lose your heart to Jesus, let Him guide your innermost world. Yield your mind to Jesus, grant Him the freedom to shape and direct your hopes your dreams your plans. If you give Jesus the inside, the outside tends to follow! If you keep control of the inside—don't you know by now where that leads? Haven't we lost our heads like Herod and Herodias often enough, not to want to do that again?

Lose your heart to Jesus. Yield your mind to Jesus. He knows what to do with it! The one who died and rose again has great plans for you and your family now, and forever; only let Him, let Him forgive and make new, guide and direct, this day and forevermore. In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.