**Morning Praise @ Home 14th July 2024**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Mark 6: 14 – 29

### Reflection from Philip The murder of John the Baptist

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The gospel of Mark was written mainly for non-Jews who had converted to Christianity. Many of them were in Rome and were subject to persecution. Mark’s gospel seeks to affirm to the young church that Jesus Christ really was the Son of God and to provide them with reassurance and encouragement.

So the account of the gruesome events of Herod’s birthday party might seem somewhat at odds with that, don’t you think?!

Well, let’s try to work out why Mark gives us this account of a bizarre birthday party where John the Baptist – well, loses his head.

Mark is trying to get us to compare different types of King and Kingdoms.

On the one hand, the glorious kingdom of God, where life works as it should.

On the other, a phoney or sham Kingdom – of greed for power, the pursuit of pleasure. People deciding to do things their own way, rather than God’s way – just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden.

However pursuing this phoney kingdom does them no good in the end; Herod is caught out by his own recklessness; the pursuit of power and pleasure leads only to shallow emptiness.

So – back to the party. This wasn’t the baby-killing King Herod of the nativity – it was his son. But this apple didn’t fall far from the tree…

This reading is very much about who Jesus is, and comparing his kingdom to the phoney kingdom of Herod. In verse 14, we read ‘King Herod heard of it, for Jesus’ name had become known’ – he had been busy doing miracles in Galilee; even the King had become aware of him.

Mark wants us to both look **back** and then to look **forward** in this account.

In looking back, we might compare Herod to an earlier King, King Ahab, and the events of 1 Kings 21 – Naboth’s vineyard. God had sent a prophet to Ahab, Elijah, who bravely stood up to the King and told him he needed to follow the true God. Ahab didn’t learn, and was soon up to no good again… he wanted the beautiful vineyard he could see from his palace window. When Naboth refused to part with it, his nasty wife, Jezebel, arranged for Naboth to be killed so Ahab could get the vineyard.

The similarities with King Herod are clear. John the Baptist had also been bravely speaking truth to Power – to Herod.

Herod also had his own Jezebel – he had taken his brother’s wife, Herodius. Herod thought he could have his power and wickedness, and yet also be engaged by John the Baptist’s preaching to him. He was intrigued and fascinated by John the Baptist.

Maybe you like to be the king or queen of your own life – but still like the message of Jesus and the gospel – but it can’t work like that. It’s either, or.

Herod was insecure, despite his wealth and power. When Jesus was mentioned, he panicked and wondered if John the Baptist, whom he had killed at this birthday party, had been raised from the dead – like Macbeth, he had a troubled and guilty conscience.

So, the big birthday party. Lots of macabre details here, including an example of exploiting a young woman. But not any young woman, his own stepdaughter (and also his niece) dances for him – we read she ‘pleased Herod and his guests’. It’s a disturbing picture.

Drunk on his own power as much as the wine, he offers her anything she wants, ‘up to half his Kingdom’. She discusses it with her mother, who takes the chance to seek the death of the man who dared criticise her relationship with the King – the man who spoke truth to power - John the Baptist.

Hearing this, Herod is troubled – he doesn’t want to kill John – John intrigues him and we read in verse 20 that ‘Herod feared John, for he knew he was a righteous and holy man’ – what will he do? Sadly, he takes the wrong path, and arranges his gruesome murder.

A phoney kingdom offers the lure of freedom – but in reality, Herod was enslaved to the people around him – he couldn’t now lose face in front of his guests who had heard him make his ridiculous vow to his stepdaughter. It’s a phoney kingdom, a house of cards.

Jesus offers a way to escape this phoney kingdom. John had told hard truths to the most powerful person. He spoke truth to power, at the risk of his life and in this instance, it cost him his life.

But Mark’s account looks **forward**, too – it foretells Jesus’ life, where he preached a gospel of love and challenging power and authority. He, too, was murdered for it.

We can also compare Herod’s treatment of John the Baptist to that of Pontius Pilot. He also acknowledged Jesus’ innocence, but ‘wishing to satisfy the crowd’ he concedes, washes his hand of the matter and allows Jesus’ execution.

John the Baptist had foretold Jesus’ coming; his death foretells Jesus’ execution. Just as Mark tells us John the Baptist’s body is recovered by his followers, so is Jesus’ body recovered by some of his.

Jesus was a totally different type of King and offers a very different type of Kingdom. Mark wants us to see this, and compare them.

Jesus’ death and then his resurrection took away the power of the phoney kingdom. Jesus allows himself to be falsely accused and murdered, then rises from the dead, and it changes everything.

I wonder if you have read (or seen the film) ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’ by CS Lewis. When I first read it as a child, I had no idea it was about Christ. I only understood much later on. When Aslan the lion comes on the scene, it changes everything. Especially after he is killed and then rises again. Aslan represents Christ.

When Jesus comes on the scene, the phoney kingdoms of the world are exposed as nothing but a temporary sham. Jesus emboldens us to have courage in Him. He doesn’t promise an easier life – there remains peril, and for some, persecution and death, even to this day. But he does promise a fuller life, a truer life, built on rock, not sand; a life closer to how God intended it to be. **Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by Sue**

Lord of the universe, who is also our Abba, thank you for sustaining us this past week. Now may you warm our hearts about the concerns that you have for your world as we come before you in prayer.

*LORD IN YOUR MERCY*: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**

**Father of all**,

* We lift up to you the new government of this nation, thanking you that a personal Christian faith guides many in the cabinet. We pray for energy and wisdom as they work out how best to serve the needs of our society. Please help them resolve impediments, while proceeding with grace. We pray also that those whose political hopes have been dashed may turn to you for purpose and guidance.
* We thank you for the shared resolve of the recent NATO convention and pray that it positively impacts the defence of Ukraine and encourages that nation. Please work your will to bring victory and peace for the vulnerable.
* Lord, we long to see the defeat of aggression and the lancing of bitterness within Israel and Gaza. Please strengthen your people to support the dispossessed, to comfort the fearful and confront evil-doers.
* Please give wisdom and a clear path to all those involved in taking decisions at this stage of the American election. May honour for your values override personal agendas. We pray too that from the political stalemate in France may arise consensus and respect for all the country’s inhabitants.
* We also lift up to you those who have been impacted by the recent storms in the West Indies, that in rebuilding a shattered physical environment, attention is also given to rebuilding damaged individuals and families.

*LORD IN YOUR MERCY*: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**

**Jesus**,

* In washing your people clean of sin, you also called them to be holy in their conduct. We pray for the worldwide Anglican communion as it seeks to uphold the Bible in cultures (including ours) which have created their own moral rules. We pray that your Word prevails and that your Spirit enables all to humbly submit their agendas to yours – which is that all should come together in love and worship as renewed people of God.
* Please strengthen archbishops, bishops and church leaders to lead with courage, wisdom and grace. We also pray for our local clergy as they gather this week, that they may know your protection and be encouraged in their ministry.
* Please help us to build the sort of relationships in this community where we can honour you and openly share our faith, offering the living water of your spirit and the food of your living word. Help us know where to start and how best to connect in each different situation we encounter, trusting that you will give us the words.

*LORD IN YOUR MERCY*: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**

**Holy Spirit**,

* We lift up ourselves to you, praying that you will refresh weary souls and bodies by a new infusion of your love and power. Help us to work effectively together for the good of the parish.
* We pray that you comfort those who are struggling with caring responsibilities, and those we know facing repeated challenges to their physical and mental health, mentioning in our hearts those known personally to us. …
* As they gather together this week, we especially remember the members of the Mothers’ Union, that they may celebrate how you have led them and seek wisdom for their future.
* We lift up to you those facing the ending of earthly life and families coping with sadness for this and other reasons. Help us to draw alongside them in practical care, and hold out to them the hope that the resurrection and ascension of Christ proclaims.
* Finally Lord, we thank you that some of our national footballers have been open about their faith in you and we pray that you enable the whole team to play to the best of their ability in today’s final.

*LORD IN YOUR MERCY*: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**

Father, Son and Spirit, you call us to live wholeheartedly for you, as John the Baptist did. May our lives this week reflect this, whatever the cost.

*MERCIFUL FATHER*: **ACCEPT THESE PRAYERS FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR SON, OUR SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**