

Mark 6: 14 - 29

And so to conclude this morning, whatever you do, don't make outrageous promises in front of dinner guests and never, ever behead a prophet! Right ... that's today's message?!

Well, I guess it could be actually. You're now looking as if I'm joking.... I'm not! I'll get to it. Let's explore these passages together this morning.

So, firstly lets look at some context ... we are in the middle of a Chapter here, we've had Jesus rejected in his hometown, we've had the 12 sent out two by two, and then there's this little interlude, before we reach the feeding of the five thousand – incidentally it's our theme of Messy Church this week – do be praying for us this afternoon.

Ok, so the disciples have headed out in twos around the various villages and Jesus has given them authority. I'm guessing they've been telling people from where the authority has come and who sent them etc and so the news of Jesus becomes known. People aren't yet sure as to who this Jesus is – they've heard of his preaching, of his miracles and his healings and many are wondering who this is ... Some are saying he is John the Baptist – John the Baptist, some Elijah and others Prophets. Herod himself thinks it's John the Baptist, who he beheaded, who had been raised!

But hang on – how can he be John the Baptist returned from the dead? Ask the readers ... last we heard he'd just been arrested. (***This is Chapter 1 verse 14***) so what happened? Well Mark pauses the account of the life of Jesus and switches to the life of John.

Why – why does Mark do this? Why do we move away from what is happening? What happened with the disciples and their missions, why waste parchment and tell us about John's death? I wonder if at this point Mark is foreshadowing Jesus' own death by a political, yet sympathetic figure. It's not just an interlude here because the manner of John's death was tied to the mission of Jesus. John preached a message to Herod that wasn't received well – that his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, was unlawful. Because of his wife he arrested John.

Jesus preached a message to the world that wasn't received well – that the hypocrisy, the sin, the wandering away from God must stop. Because of this he was arrested. Because of the fear of John, Herod kept him safe. Did Herod fear Jesus in the same way? When they met he was excited to see Jesus and to see a miracle – and yet is this a misplaced excitement? An excitement about a magic trick rather than an inward change?

John was of course killed because of the hatred of Herodias towards John, and the desire of Herod to keep face before his dinner guests after he made his oath. And so John was killed and his body placed in a tomb, it was cowardly but to Herod there was nothing he could do about it.

Jesus was killed because of the hatred of the religious leaders, and to a lesser extent some of the crowd ... also because both Herod and Pilate wanted to keep face before the people around. And Jesus was crucified and placed in a tomb ... nothing Herod or Pilate could do about it

So there's quite a lot of detail in this passage too, it goes into some length about how it came about, and speaks of the brutality of John's death. And there's a similar amount of detail in the death of Jesus too, and similar brutality.

We can't be sure quite why Mark includes this all here, but there are perhaps a couple of things:

First perhaps Mark is highlighting that Jesus' ministry, like John's, has significant 'political' implications. By political I don't mean who to vote for, I mean the Kingdom Jesus (and John) preaches challenges our penchant, our comfort with the status quo. Our all too easy compliance with the culture's presumption that power, wealth, status or fame makes something or someone "ok" ...

Could we put someone like Donald Trump in this category? Making promises from a place of power to appease the masses (well, he must of done – how else did he get elected?) or what about the Brexit debate (where did that money from the NHS go?) or what about the way that Boris so quickly jumps to the defence of Dominic Cummings or Matt Hancock? And then backtracks after the crowd turns ...

Far too easily we lay aside our own understanding of what is "right" in order to avoid losing face, or to avoid **PTO**

conflict. We hear of how Herod clearly thought something of John, but faced with a crowd, and the possibility of losing respect went along with something that I'm sure he knew was wrong. I mean do you think chopping off someone's head and giving it on a plate to, what scholars generally think is, a 12 year old?

Or perhaps we make promises that actually we shouldn't make, rashly or in order to impress – again, would you really give a 12 year old half of your kingdom? Whatever you do, don't make outrageous promises in front of dinner guests! Basically – think about what you promise but most importantly – don't do something just to protect yourself, to save face, to make yourself look good instead of doing what is **right!**

And of course, how do we find what is right? It is through prayer, discernment, studying the Bible, asking for God's guidance, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And never, ever behead a prophet!

All of us are called to be prophets sometimes ... To call out what is going wrong, to speak up for injustice and the truth of the Bible to proclaim the Gospel in and out of season.

And sometimes, our nature means that when it appears that God is blessing someone more than us, we might get a bit 'put out' ... We might feel we're here slogging away and Mrs 'chosen' over there has it easy! Well, you're probably wrong – you don't know their struggles

And secondly we should be building one another up, cheering one another on. and if there's a problem, if there's a genuine thing we disagree with, don't spend time gossiping or belittling that person behind their back – go to them privately and directly – following the example of **Matthew 18** – **'if a brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault between the two of you.'** Sometimes if there's a problem it's like you talk to everyone else but that person! Don't behead the prophet, instead ask God for wisdom and *speak to them!*

And I think too Mark is pointing us towards what may happen to us. Those who stand up to Government, to Institutions, to the World and its increasingly progressive agendas with the whole 'cancel culture' thing that is developing where "its ok to think differently as long as you think my differently" can usually expect those who benefit from this worldly status quo to come down on them hard.

Mark is a realist, he's writing in the wake of the devastation of the Romans, who exercised their brutal power to destroy the temple – the World as he knows is, and the World we live in as well is increasingly pushing the Church to the margins, faith to the private and truth into individualism. To go against this tide invites beheading.

Sounds pretty grim huh?

But that's not the end of the story. It's not the end of the account of Jesus, it's just the beginning. And this account draws us into the reality of the broken and fallen nature of the world, where personal power is held onto at all costs, even to the detriment of the other, and the crowds have the final say, and then into a new way of being ... To the very heart of the Gospel promise that actually Jesus came to show a different way to be.

There is more to life than we can perceive, more than just life, but **abundant** life. Jesus came so that our stories can have a better ending, that the story of the world can have a better ending, that the whole world, and all can be ransomed, healed restored and forgiven.

And when the Temple has just been destroyed, or a loved one dies, or you've lost your job, or you fear your child will never speak to you again, or you're pretty sure your friend has betrayed you, or you think you may just have screwed up the one relationship that meant something to you ... then the possibility of another ending — a good ending — is, indeed, not just good news, but the best news you can imagine.

The truth is that without God we would be like Herod, we easily slip into making outrageous promises and 'beheading' prophets! But God responds with love, and calls us to be a part in telling a different story, with a different ending.

A story of Biblical truth, of the salvation found in the life, death and resurrection of **Christ alone** and to stand assured, that even when facing beheading – or whatever – that this is not the end of the story.