

27 July Sermon Draft

Complicated family structures are not an invention of the 21st century. Herod Antipas divorced his first wife. She was the daughter of the Nabatean King of Petra. Petra that red stone city some of you have visited. Herodias his second wife had been married to Herod Antipas' half-brother, Philip, who was her uncle. Salome was the child of this union. Herodias left Philip to live publicly with Herod.

John the Baptist had been calling Herod out on this. Herod Antipas **was** the ruler of Galilee and Perea, but it seems he was ruled by his wife Herodias. At a drinking party, after watching his teenage niece/stepdaughter perform what is assumed to have been a seductive dance, he makes a rash promise. Instead of reneging on a promise he tries to save face in front of his drunken guests by bending to his wife's wishes. But he remains haunted by John. Which is why he thinks Jesus is John come back to life.

This story reminds me of the DoBee and the Don't Bee of a Canadian television children's program I watched as a kid. The DoBee and the Don't Bee were two bumble bees who would come out and teach children desirable and undesirable behaviour according to the norms of the day. The story of Herod's party and the execution of John the Baptist is a DoBee Don't Be story for Christian adults. Don't Be like anyone involved in this party and Do Be like John's disciples.

I tell myself Do Be like the disciples of John. They did what they could, then they went to Jesus. This is good advice. When tragedy strikes, I can do what I can and go to Jesus with rest.

I tell myself Don't Be like any of the other people in this story.
I found some questions to ask myself as I reflect on Herod's raucous party.

Have I, like Herod, sometimes said something rash to impress my friends?
Have I failed to admit a mistake, and continued in what I knew was wrong, to save face?

Have I pressured someone to use their sexuality in an unhealthy way, as Herod and Herodias pressured their daughter and niece?

Have I been a bystander, like the guests at the drunken party, and let something happen without making a protest?

Have I ever figuratively speaking cut someone's head off to avoid hearing the truth from them?

I tell myself Don't Be like that.

And when the Holy Spirit convicts me of sin for my lack of integrity – my compromises with the world – When I hear the Don't Bee accusing me – Today's Psalm has some suggestions.

Listen again to the prayer in the Psalm portion we read from Psalm 69:

Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good;
according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

¹⁷ Do not hide your face from your servant,
for I am in distress—make haste to answer me.

¹⁸ Draw near to me, redeem me,
set me free because of my enemies.

(Bible Gateway)

We address the Lord because his steadfast love is good and his mercy is abundant. The psalmist, King David, makes six requests to the Lord God.

Turn to me
Do not hide your face
Answer me
Draw near to me
Redeem me
Set me free

In this Psalm, David bewails the unjust suffering he has received at the hand of his enemies. Jeremiah too received much unjust suffering. John the Baptist suffered unjustly, and Jesus, the spotless lamb, suffered, just as we read in the next verses of Psalm 69, shame, dishonour and insults. He had foes and his heart was broken. Those who should have been with him to offer support and comfort could not be found: all had fled. It is because of his suffering and because of his triumphant resurrection from the dead that Jesus can answer our heart's prayer. Jesus, by his unjust suffering, paid the penalty for all our big sins and all our tiny compromises. Jesus does turn to us. He does not hide his face from us. He answers us. He draws near to us. He redeems us. Jesus sets us free.

Whether I have turned to Jesus in my despair many times or whether today for the first time, Jesus will answer. He draws near to us. He redeems us. He sets us free.

Thanks be to God.