

Worship Service for July 11th: 7th Sunday after Pentecost

- **Old Testament:** 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19
- **New Testament:** Mark 6:14-29
- **Psalms:** Psalm 24

Announcements:

- Wednesday, July 14th: Session meeting for St. David's, TR.
- July 19th – 23rd: Vacation Bible School for St. George's.
- July 26th – 28th: Vacation Bible School for St. David's.

Sermon Title: Fearing God and not Man!

Last week we saw that the people of Jesus' hometown didn't believe anything good about him. They thought he must have been using evil powers to perform miracles and preach with such wisdom. And today we see others who didn't have that kind of prejudice against him attempting to explain the source of his miraculous powers. They speculated that it was either the prophet Elijah or one of the other prophets, or it was John the Baptist. Herod Antipas, who had ordered for John the Baptist's execution was convinced that it was John the Baptist who had come back to life.

Mark decides to narrate to us how John the Baptist had died and this falls among some of the shocking stories that we have heard in the Bible. Although John the Baptist had rebuked Herod Antipas for his marriage to his half-brother's wife, he didn't have the courage to kill him because he was a righteous man, and he was afraid of him. He even listened to John the Baptist preach and we are told that he was intrigued by his preaching. But because of the oath that he made to his wife's daughter and through the request of Herodias who hated John the Baptist, we are told that Herod ordered his execution at the request of the young lady.

When she made her request, the Bible tells us that the king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Herod was so concerned about how humans would look at him that he decided to execute a prophet, one of the greatest that ever existed.

How many times have we acted like Herod Antipas? How many times have we had opportunities to tell others about Jesus, but because we were afraid of how people would react, we restrained ourselves? Or that someone was blaspheming God and because we were the only Christian couldn't say anything about it. Or been with

our friends and followed them to places that we knew we shouldn't go or engaged in activities that we weren't supposed to because we didn't want others to judge us? Or the opportunity to practice justice, to speak up for someone but we did not because like Herod we were trying to save face?

One time or another, we all have found ourselves in this position. Maybe someone was in need of help, and we didn't help them because we were preoccupied with something else that was not even that important. Maybe someone needed a shoulder to cry on and we lied that we didn't have time when we actually did. It could be that someone was looking so out of place and lonely and we could walk up to them and talk to them, but we chose not to.

The Word of God each time it comes to us, doesn't come with the intention of condemning us but of correcting and teaching us. It is to help us look at ourselves and remind ourselves of where we have fallen short and learn how we can fix things. It is not trying to make us feel guilty because I am sure we are good at doing that to ourselves. I'm sure someone listening to me now can remember a time when they could have done better, and they didn't and how they have beaten themselves up for years because of that. We are all humans – a bunch of people with lots of imperfections trying their best to live good lives and make good decisions.

In the course of trying to live like good Christians, we might find ourselves doing wrong. The apostle Paul said, "I do not do the good that I want, I find myself doing the evil that I don't want (Romans 7:15-17)." It is a struggle for all of us because sometimes we are torn between pleasing those around us that we care for and our Lord God. Herod found John the Baptist's preaching interesting and always listened to him but failed in the face of those he was trying to impress.

Living life in the fear of God is not a one-off battle. It is a constant battle. We have to be true to ourselves about the struggles and do something about it. Charles Spurgeon said, "the sin of doing nothing is the biggest sin of all sins." Acting or not acting in order to save face is wrong; putting man before God is wrong. What is worse is doing nothing about that.

2 Peter 1 encourages us to make the effort to grow in the grace of God and to live for Him. It tells us that God has given us everything we need for living a godly life; for being good Christian examples to others around us. We are called upon to "*make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and*

knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love."

Our greatest desire and everyday goal and purpose is to be more like Jesus. Our greatest motivation should be for diligent and faithful living in Christ, representing him to the best of our abilities with the help of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 3:1 says, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."* Therefore we have what it takes in us. All we need is the constant help of the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and direct us. May God give us more and more grace and peace as we grow in our knowledge of God and Jesus Christ our Lord to make a difference in our world. Amen.

Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, for all your goodness to us. In Christ, we meet your love and wisdom, face to face. Through the Holy Spirit, we recognize the abilities and opportunities you create in us and for us, to reach out to the world you love. We thank you for all the ways friends and families, neighbours and strangers, reach out to us and to others, offering support and kindness, speaking up when we must confront wrongdoing, celebrating when achievements bless us all with healing and happiness.

Today we pray for courageous leaders in cities, countries and congregations who strive to serve with integrity and honesty in a world prone to self-interest. We pray for those who struggle to create justice where it has been compromised, and to build reconciliation and understanding in divided communities. We remember before you quiet and reliable leaders who keep their word and meet their deadlines so that we can depend on them in these unsettling times.

We pray for patient church members and community volunteers, who work diligently towards long-term goals that will improve our life together. And we pray for the creative, impatient change makers, who keep challenging us, to be bolder and more determined in righting wrongs and trying new strategies.

We pray for the troubled in mind or spirit, for the angry and unhappy, and for those who feel that every day is a struggle. Soothe their concerns and open their hearts to claim the hope and help you offer.

We remember before you the sick and the dying, and the bereaved who must try to put their lives back together again. We pray for those who are recovering from the pandemic, looking for better health, a fresh start, more stability or a glimpse of hope. Draw close to all these who suffer, offering your comfort and courage to face whatever comes next.

Receive our prayers, both spoken and unspoken, and embrace us all in your love. Give us hearts to understand not only what you do on our behalf, but also what you call us to do on your behalf, for we are friends and followers of Jesus, who taught us to 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 this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you this coming week, you and your loved ones. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance on you and grant to you and yours His wonderful Shalom, wholeness and peace in Jesus' name. Amen.