

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Psalm 24; Mark 6:14-29

Where is the gospel in this story? Where is the good news of Jesus Christ here?

Certainly it is located within the Gospel according to St. Mark, but where is the good news in the story? Yes, the name Jesus is mentioned in the customary introductory verses that go with this selection, but for the most part, the work of Jesus Christ *per se* is not mentioned at all. Usually, all the stories from the four gospel books in the Bible have to do with some kind of parable, miracle story or at least some lesson on Jesus Himself. We don't see any of that here...at least at the outset.

The story is gruesome, to say the least. **It is tragic and has little to set it up as an example of good and faithful living.** To be sure, there is the note that John the Baptist is dying for his calling attention to the immorality of Herod and Herodias his illegal wife. There is that.

But most of the story has to do with a sensual dance.

Let's start with the dance. That may be the thing that catches our attention first. Dancing: it is a problem for some more than others, if we were to be truthful about it, in more ways than one. For there are those of us who just don't dance very well, even if it is simply a shake, the watusi, the boot scoot shuffle, the bump or the complexity of the jitterbug. Of course some of our faith traditions didn't think dancing was appropriate at all, perhaps even in youth groups...

Yet the problem was not whether Herodias' daughter could dance or not, but how she danced. A carnal rendition as some might describe the act. It was enough to titillate Herod and make Herodias insanely jealous. Her dance was to make Herod and the guests happy and aroused, in my guess. The dance was to arouse.

And yet, there was **another famous dance** in the Bible that belonged to King David, which is the Old Testament account that was also suggested for this morning. David, it is recorded, danced to show his respect, thanksgiving and a sense of the glory of God. It was a good dance and by biblical inclusion, appropriate.

So the dance was actually neither here nor there, in the long run...and back we go to Herod's rash promises.

The response to the dance is what is central. For the monarch is more worried about protecting his reputation and rash promises, than having a sense of morality and integrity. He is the opposite, to be sure, of what it means to be a person that follows the call of faithfulness to God. The dancer and the jealous evil of Herodias the mother are only vehicles in the story to show the spinelessness of Herod. Indeed, it has been noted that Herod liked to listen to John, but didn't have the guts to follow through on his calls to repentance. **He was more concerned about his image, or rather his reputation than his salvation,** apparently.

One can say that Herod was a man of his word, and **consistency was more important than character.**

And that may be where the gospel comes in. It comes in through the back door in that we have a negative example of what it means to be a man of one's word...to make good on the promises that

is made in the board room, on the campaign trail, or even in the moments of passionate intimacy, and so on.

**Sometimes promises are made that should not be kept.
Being true to your word may not always be the same as being true to God.
For it is God's Word rather than our word that is most important.**

For the most parts, **we are people that are careful and committed to what we promise, especially in the presence of God.** We can name some of those promises, which we make with care and commitment, and not out of regard to enhancing our reputation. We make those commitments and even lifelong vows for that matter, for the sole purpose of making sure that we do that which is what good, kind and faithful.

They can be the marriage vows, the humble pledge card, or the vows that people make that are ordained and installed for church office. For those who serve the church and its members, acts are carried out not to satisfy the wants of others, or the accumulation of divine accolades, but for the building up the kingdom of God in the way that Christ alone calls for in Scripture. Following through on the promises that we make are not done "out of regard for the guests at the party," but for the glory and love of God, and the true love of the other.

In fact, one of the characteristics of the faithful person, so says Psalm 15, is that the ones who love God are those "who stand by their oath even to their hurt." (Ps.15.4)

The entire psalm bears remembering:

O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the Lord; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.

Herod wasn't even close, as far as we can tell.

Today, in the sacrament we have the promises of God that are given without our performance in dance, song or erudite petitions in prayer. There are the promises that are not dependent upon how they will be perceived and evaluated. They are just promises of the presence and perseverance of the grace of God throughout the week to come and all of our lives.

Jesus Christ was and is a man of His Word ... and so we are called to be ... His Word.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.