

July 15, 2018  
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Mark 6:14-29  
The Rev. Erin Hensley

### More Willing to Come to This Table

The followers of John the Baptist heard about what had happened to their leader and came to take his body and lay him in a tomb. Not so much for the closest followers of Jesus.

Those closest followers were in a room huddled up in fear. They most likely gathered in the very same room where they had experienced a celebration of their own with Jesus as the host. Not a birthday party, of course, but a celebration of Passover, when our spiritual ancestors remember when the Lord passed over the Israelites so they could be liberated from bondage. This celebration involved bread and wine and special prayers. No literal head on a platter.

Instead, the Son of God and the Son of Man blessing, breaking, and sharing a loaf of bread saying “This is my body.” Jesus blessing the cup and sharing the wine saying “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

Unlike Herod who beheaded John the Baptist to keep the leaders happy, Jesus, the host of the Passover celebration, does not imprison those who disagree with him. Unlike Herod, Jesus, the host of communion, does not promise anything the guests ask. Unlike Herod, Jesus, the host of this Celebration of Holy Eucharist, does not make immoral choices.

Jesus, the ultimate host, is different. And we know that following Jesus’ lead is holy and sometimes hard work. We know that the One we claim to follow is none other than God incarnate and that Jesus was crucified as an enemy of the state. In turn, we do not expect following Jesus, even in our own congregational life, to always be comfortable. The host of this party never promised easy.

Easy is the way of Herod, the way of Empire. Easy is when prophets speak and their heads are served on platters. Easy is when difference is criminalized and business as usual is king.

Thank the Lord, God would never host a celebration like this. Some scholars call this retrospective on the beheading of John the Baptist the perverse meal. This is not the meal of community, but a meal of political convenience. This is not a meal of sharing, but a meal of scapegoating. The meal of Herod during his birthday party is the antithesis of the meal Jesus’ hosts.

The perverse meal in which John the Baptist dies for speaking truth to power still happens. Such violence is perpetrated as heads of families are separated from their

children,<sup>1</sup> as transgendered people are murdered,<sup>2</sup> as black, American Indian, and Alaska Native men are killed by legal intervention.<sup>3</sup> And these are only of a few of the ways that the hosting practices of Herod continue. If I were to list them all, I would lose my mind.

But thankfully, neither you nor I have to be beheaded in order to follow God. Neither did John the Baptist of course, but this is what happens when the distortion of empire encounters truth. You get served.

So where's the Good News in this?

That even in the midst of John being beheaded, Jesus didn't stop. God incarnate did not give in to business as usual. God incarnate did not trade truth for convenience. God incarnate did not treat facts as fiction. God incarnate did not fall in love with power.

Just like parishioners rightfully want their leaders to practice what they preach, I want God to practice what God preaches. I want the Truth to set me free from following an easy way. I want the Truth to liberate me to follow Jesus instead of my own illusions and distortions of others and myself. More than anything else, I want to know that my following Jesus, the ultimate host of the table, is not in vain.

I want to know that when I speak up for those separated at the border, when I speak up about a racist joke, when I speak up for those who are poor and not at any table, I want to know that even though I might get served, such speech is not in vain. Because of God who as decisively revealed in Jesus the Christ.

Not because I have decided to follow Jesus in my more faithful moments. The speaking up even when some might say I have lost my head will not be in vain because the head of the Church, the head of the Body of Christ is still the Head of the Body. Resurrected and all in all. I know that my speaking up will not be in vain because after Jesus was laid in a tomb, the stone was rolled back, and the women heard that Jesus had been raised that that Jesus had gone ahead of them.

This is what I am counting on. This is the Gospel truth that helps me be less afraid and more willing to come to this table for strength and renewal, not just solace and pardon.

---

<sup>1</sup> DeNeen L. Brown "Barbaric': America's cruel history of separating children from their parents"

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/05/31/barbaric-americas-cruel-history-of-separating-children-from-their-parents/?utm\\_term=.6c2a799492a8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/05/31/barbaric-americas-cruel-history-of-separating-children-from-their-parents/?utm_term=.6c2a799492a8)

<sup>2</sup> "Violence Against the Transgender Community in 2018"

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2018>

<sup>3</sup> Jacqueline Howard "Black men nearly 3 times as likely to die from police use of force, study says" <https://www.cnn.com/2016/12/20/health/black-men-killed-by-police/index.html>

That Jesus practiced what he preached, that Jesus beat death at its own game, that Jesus is host at this holy meal we will soon share, that Jesus is alive waiting to meet us. This is the truth in which our life stands. This is what I pray will give us the strength to seek and be the Body of Christ around this table, around every table. *Amen.*