

The Mind of Christ

[Ephesians 1:3-14](#)

[Mark 6:14-29](#)

The beheading of John the Baptist has been a powerful image in the minds of artists through the ages. And not surprisingly. Here the death of the one who was speaking truth to power is literally served up on a plate. This must have been a deep sadness to Jesus, as well as an omen of how his life was likely to end. He and John were cousins, probably brought up together and John's imprisonment was the trigger that started Jesus' own ministry.

But our reading today is about Herod, who hearing of Jesus and the teaching of his disciples was afraid that John had come back from the dead to haunt him.

This Herod is the son of King Herod who met with the magi after Jesus was born and planned to put an end to him by killing all the boys in Bethlehem and vicinity who were less than 2 years old. This Herod, who only ruled a portion of the territory his father did, finally got to meet Jesus at the end of Jesus' life, when he was being questioned by Pilate. Herod and Pilate became friends that day. (Lk 23:8-12).

We can compare the way the cousins John and Jesus lived with how the friends Pilate and Herod lived their lives. There are many differences, but in particular we can see a strong contrast in the way they exercised power.

Pilate and Herod had power vested in them by the system, but neither was secure in their position. They ruled under the Roman Emperor, and their job was to keep the peace in Palestine, whatever it took. They both stood to lose a great deal if there was an insurgency. And both of them used violence and intimidation to keep an uneasy peace.

Herod liked to listen to John, and in fact saw him as a holy man, but what John said was inconvenient truth. John called Herod out for having married his brother's wife Herodias while his brother was still living. The first-century historian Josephus wrote, "Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of our country, and divorced herself from her husband while he was alive, and was married to Herod Antipas." Josephus blamed Herodias but John challenged Herod.

John saw immoral behavior in the leadership of the country and he called it what it was. In the same way, Jesus saw the oppressive behavior of the Pharisees and the chief priests and he spoke out. Their power was not given to them by the system. They had no institutional power. All their power came from the Spirit of God working in and through them and the people they inspired. They were not afraid to stand up to the manifestation of the sin matrix and they both gave their lives as a result. But God gave Jesus the gift of new life and in so doing opened up a whole new creation – the second creation of resurrected beings.

Between Herod and John we see the conflict between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God people live with integrity, following the teaching and example of Jesus as we seek the highest good for all beings. This is our daily challenge – to live a life of gentleness, forgiveness

and healing, seeing the Christ in all beings but at the same time being willing to stand up to power being inappropriately used.

It is easy for us to see that Herod's marriage to Herodias lacked integrity. But I wonder how easy it was at the time. We live in a time when facts get distorted in order to serve political agendas, where it seems that we are kept off balance so that we cannot truly evaluate the actions of our leaders. Sometimes it is difficult for us to know for sure what is happening. Left wing pundits continually tell us that we are in the throes of a huge disaster for democracy while many other people think that this shake-up is exactly what we need as a country to re-establish our power in the world.

God does not belong to a political party. God does not take sides. With one big exception, that God always shows a preference for the poor and the oppressed.

As the followers of Jesus, we get to do the same. Whatever the situation, our guiding principle is to look at what is happening for those who are most in need. What is happening to the children, the elderly, the mentally ill, the disabled and yes, the immigrant?

What we do not get to do is to hate or denigrate those with whom we disagree. We are called to build bridges not to tear them down. This is difficult. It is especially difficult in a time when the prevailing mood is to build walls and when the media constantly highlight insults and belittlement. It is easy for us to allow our minds to be filled with anger, fear and confusion. It is easy for us to get negative and forget that we are the Jesus movement, we are a resurrection people.

Think about what you are filling your mind with. Garbage in, garbage out. Are you spending long hours listening to political commentary, the latest bouts of accusations and counter-accusations?

I want to suggest that this is not enlarging the kin-dom of God. We are the ones who, as the writer to the Ephesians put it, we are the ones who God who has blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. This is what should be filling our minds. In Philippians Paul says, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things."

I'm not suggesting that we bury our heads in the sand. Far from it. I am suggesting that you develop a discipline of news gathering. I am suggesting that you discern the sources that seem to you to have the highest integrity and the most even coverage and you watch, listen and read only enough to be informed. And then you pray about what you hear. You pray for all those involved, including those with whom you disagree. And then you take action for the poor and oppressed.

It is our privilege and our joy to nurture within ourselves the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ. In Christ we have been adopted as the children of God. In Christ we have hope. As the Ephesians reading said, "With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." That is our hope. That in the fullness of time God will gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.

It is too easy for us to allow the kingdom of this world to dwell and grow in our hearts and minds. It is too easy to feed fear and anger. It is too easy to see only a negative world where integrity is lacking and relationships are being broken even as the planet heats up.

But that is not the way of the followers of Jesus and John. That is the way of Herod and Pilate.

Our way is to seek and serve the Christ in all beings. Especially those with whom we disagree.

There was a time not so long ago when everyone assumed that everyone around them was heterosexual. People didn't think they knew any gay people and gay people kept quiet because they knew from the jokes and from the assumptions that it wouldn't be easy, it wouldn't be safe to come out as gay. As a young woman I left church because everyone always assumed everyone else, including me, was straight.

Most of us in this church tend to be socially progressive. Most of us are unhappy with the current administration. But that is not true of everyone. If we seek to be a truly diverse, inclusive congregation then we need to make this a safe place for people who have different opinions. We need to honor those who do not share our political views just as we honor those who do not share our sexual preference. I imagine we all intend to, but I don't think that's the way we are living.

Who would you rather follow, John or Herod? Jesus or Pilate?

It all starts in the mind, in the heart. Do you choose to follow the Prince of Peace or the Prince of Darkness? Do you choose to further the kingdom of this world or the kingdom of God? How do you choose to fill your mind –with the negativity and greed of this world or with thoughts of hope and beauty?

Herod loved to listen to John but it didn't penetrate his heart so that it changed his behavior. Let us allow the word of God to penetrate our hearts and change our behaviors so that we may truly be the followers of Christ, members of the Jesus movement.