

## *Mark 6:14-29, 2015*

<sup>14</sup>King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." <sup>15</sup>But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." <sup>16</sup>But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

<sup>17</sup>For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. <sup>18</sup>For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." <sup>19</sup>And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, <sup>20</sup>for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. <sup>21</sup>But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. <sup>22</sup>When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." <sup>23</sup>And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." <sup>24</sup>She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer."<sup>25</sup>Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."<sup>26</sup>The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. <sup>27</sup>Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, <sup>28</sup>brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. <sup>29</sup>When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

## *Mark 6:14-29, 2015*

Today's Gospel lesson takes a distinct turn from the course the Gospel of Mark seemed to be taking up to this point and the gospel lesson of last week.

It appears to be an interlude between the sending of the disciples which we heard about last week,

and the return of the disciples from their mission trips we will hear about next week.

But in the larger context of Mark's Gospel what follows is the feeding of the 5,000.

This places the story we hear today in stark contrast with the one we read in the verses that follow.

In our gospel lesson today Herod is celebrating his birthday with family, friends and other leaders of Galilee. You can imagine what that must have been like;

The aroma of fine food, the taste of the finest wine, music by the best musicians playing in the background as the crowd engaged in swapping stories and laughing and having a good time.

Then there of course were the other entertainers, dancers among whom was Herod's daughter, Herodias.

As you watch this video you witness the political intrigue, the power plays that would be acted out at an event like that,

And a part of that is described as Herodias demands and receives the head of John the Baptist.

Now, as that video plays in your head, along side it play this one.

Jesus gets out of the boat and walks ashore to a place where he had planned on having some quiet rest with His disciples for a while

only to be greeted by a huge crowd of people waiting in great anticipation of what he might do or say next.

Will he heal me, my daughter, my wife, my aging parent?

What will he say? What story is He going to tell us today?

Jesus walks up the slope to a place high enough to see and be heard by all as they sit in the green grass with the sea breeze blowing off the Sea of Galilee,

and he begins to teach them about the Kingdom of God.

The day grows late and the people need to eat. The disciples come to Jesus and suggest that He send them away so they can get something to eat. And Jesus says,

“You give them something to eat.”

They are shocked. They only have 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. How are they supposed to feed them?

Jesus has all the people sit down, he looks up to heaven and blesses the food they have and they all ate and were filled with plenty left over.

No feast of fine food, no fine wine, no music or entertainment or dancers.

There is no political intrigue or power plays, no head delivered on a platter.

but only blessing and surprising abundance.

What do we see in these videos?

We see the contrast between the haves and the have nots:

those with power and influence and those without,  
those with wealth and those who are poor.

Perhaps there is another contrast;

those who are totally invested in the kingdom of this world and  
those who have at least some investment in the kingdom of God.

Like Herod and all those who are celebrating his birthday we sometimes identify ourselves by our investment in, and perhaps success in the kingdom of this world,

while making our identity as member of the of God's Kingdom secondary at best.

You remember that in the first chapter of Mark Jesus makes the Kingdom of God a primary theme which is carried through the entire Gospel.

You have goals and dreams, you want to make your way in the world and have an impact and there is nothing wrong with that.

That is what God created you for.

You have to place your trust in something. What will it be, and how do the choices you make impact your lives when the truth is that you have to find a way to live in and with both of these kingdoms that are so different?

I don't know if any of you watch Game of Thrones on HBO or play the game on your tablet or smart phone. I don't, but in the game description you are invited to "Experience the action and political intrigue worthy of HBO's beloved TV series..."

I have been told that early in the game you are told by a central character that

"you win or your die. There is no middle ground."

I did recently watch a TV docudrama about how the Mafia got started in our country and as I reflect on that the rule was certainly at play.

"...you win or your die. There is no middle ground."

Your life is not that dramatic and the stakes are not that high, however, while you live in the kingdom of this world you are expected to play by their rules to achieve your goals.

Along the way you can die in many ways.

Look at our political structure and activity in this country. It is a vicious, high stakes game,

and for those called to, or who have chosen this life it is winner take all.

The personal attacks and sacrifices made are like little deaths suffered along the way.

Life in the corporate world is not much different often times.

You work and strive to move up in the organization, increasing your span of influence, fulfilling your potential with the gifts God gave you,

giving all you have to it believing that everyone else is playing fair just like you are.

You discover early on that others have sway and influence over your job satisfaction and career path.

Their opinions matter and often can determine your future.

Disappointments, wounds suffered by the hurtful words of those who you thought were on your side and betrayal all are little deaths that create loss and leave their mark on your identity.

Little pieces of you can die along the way.

“You win or die. There is no middle ground.” That is the game of this world.

There is another way.

While the kingdom of this world holds one reality for you, the Kingdom of God holds a very different one.

When you play in the Kingdom of God that Jesus talks about, or are drawn into it, captivated by it, surrender to it—the first thing you do is die.

It isn't a long drawn out process carried out by the words and actions of others.

Your dying is surrender to God.

You die to all the things you thought were important;

You die to your need for power, influence, wealth and whatever things of this world motivate you,

And what is important to God, God's calling becomes the most important thing.

And a I thought about it, you die to the power, influence and wealth of others and whatever control that gives them over you,

because you have someone else guiding your life.

---

As you make the Kingdom of God the one that holds your ultimate allegiance you set yourself free from so much of that other stuff.

You are free because they no longer influence or control your identity, or your purpose in life.

You are set free because you are confident that your identity, future, your value, your purpose is in God's hands and there is nothing in this world that can take that away from you.

And then you not so much win, but are given all you could ever want:  
life, love, acceptance and purpose.

That may not make a very good evening drama series on HBO,  
but it will change your life.