

7th Sunday after Pentecost, Mark 6:14-29 (Proper 10)
The Death of John the Baptist

Amos 7:7-15

Psalm 85:8-13

Ephesians 1:3-14

Preached at the Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Greenville, SC on Sunday July 11th, 2021.

The steadfast love of God, the life of Jesus Christ, and the growth of the Holy Spirit
be with you all. Amen.

*Last week's Gospel reading
concluded with Jesus sending out his disciples in groups of **two**
throughout the villages of **Galilee**
- proclaiming **repentance**,
- casting out **demons**,
- and **curing** the sick ... **all** in the name of **Jesus Christ**.

And while his disciples went forth in **mission**,
Jesus himself **also** continued to do the same.

And this **evangelic mission**, we were told, was turning out to be a **success!**

The concluding verse we heard read from **last** week's Gospel passage said:
"So [the disciples] went out and proclaimed that **all** should **repent**.
They **cast out** many demons,
and **anointed** with **oil** many who were **sick** ... and **cured** them." ...

*Today's reading begins with the Good News of the gospel
continuing to be **spread** throughout the region of **Galilee**
as the Twelve and Jesus **persevered** in mission. ____

And these reports even made it to the palace of **King Herod**
who wondered, "Who then is this **Jesus**?" ...

He heard some people say Jesus was the great prophet **Elijah**
who was taken up into heaven in the Lord's **chariot of fire**
and believed would return one day. ...

Other people said Jesus was surely a **prophet**
- like one of those of days gone by - but he was **not necessarily** Elijah. ...
And still others said Jesus was **John the Baptist** raised from the dead. ...

It was this last **explanation** of who Jesus was *believed* to be
that Herod **also** accepted as **truth** ... and **feared!** ____

*In today's gospel telling, we hear an **interlude**; a story within a story.

While the mission of the Twelve and Jesus continues in the villages of Galilee,
- and Jesus becomes more and more **well-known** -
Herod **thinks back** to his **execution** of **John the Baptist**. ____

Even though he feared John and knew John was a **holy** and **righteous** man,
Herod made the mistake of getting **drunk** at his birthday party
and promising this **step-daughter** anything she wanted.

After consulting with her mother,
she requested the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

And not wanting to be **embarrassed** in front of his guests,
Herod granted his step-daughter her request. ____

Because Herod lost his head **figuratively**, John the Baptist lost his head **literally**!

... And now Herod wondered,
"Has John's **spirit** returned in this man Jesus to **haunt** him?"

Herod wondered just what **is** this mission of Jesus; and how will it affect him. ____

*Now the Bible reading which follows this one
begins with the Twelve coming **back together**
to share with Jesus their awesome experience
evangelizing to the people of **Galilee**!

Mark writes: "The **apostles** gathered around Jesus,
and told him **all** that they had **done** and **taught**." ...

Yes, the mission of the Twelve was a **success**!

This is **wonderful news**; news meant to be **shared** with others! ____

Why then does the gospel writer **Mark**
include this **depressing story** of John the Baptist's **death** in the middle of it?
Why does he **sandwich** "John's story"
between such an **uplifting** and **successful** mission? ...

Well, perhaps it is to remind us
that being a **missionary of Christ** is not always an **easy road** to travel.

Along the way, we are sure to face **opposition**.
Along the way, we will face those who do **not** want us to tell others about **Jesus**. ____

We can see this in today's society!

The mission in which we are **baptized**
won't always be a **stress-free** road to follow. ____

*A story was told of actresses **Helen Hayes** and **Mary Martin**
one day out taking a **stroll** in Paris.

Mary was wearing a new fashion-designed dress, which she was proud to don.

When all of a sudden, a bird swooped down and **dropped a load** right on her!
(*PLOP!*) ...

Helen thought **Mary** would blow her top.
But **Mary** turned to **Helen** and simply said,
"[You know]for some people, [birds] only **sing**." ...

When it comes to sharing the gospel,
we will have our **successes** - thanks be to God! ...
But at other times, we will be face **difficulties**. ____

Remember, Jesus was **unwelcomed** in his hometown.
Remember, Jesus told his disciples as they went forth:
"If any place will **not** welcome you and they **refuse** to hear you,
as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet
as a testimony **against** them." ...

Perhaps the writer of the gospel according to **Mark** included "**John's story**"
because **persecutions** were taking place within the Church
at the time of its **writing**
- which is believed to be around the year **A.D. 70**.

Therefore, to include this **interlude**, gave Mark's readers *hope* for the future. ____

Whatever the reason may be, I believe **Mark inserts** the story of John's death
as a **realistic reminder** that not *all* people will **rejoice**
as we go forth **evangelizing** in Jesus' name.

Like **Mary Martin**, we are bound to be **pooped upon** from time to time. ____

*Nevertheless, in the end, the **grace** and **glory** of God will prevail!

The Good News will continue to be shared,
because **prophets** - like you and me - will continue to **proclaim it** to others! ____

Herod could not **silence** the proclamation of **John the Baptist**
even though he was killed.

Pilate could not **silence** the proclamation of **Jesus**
even though he was crucified.

Despite the **martyrdom**

of the **apostles** and **other proclaimers** of faith in Jesus Christ,
the **Good News** - the Holy Gospel - **continues** to be heard:

The Good News that **Salvation** is **ours** through Jesus Christ!

The Good News that Christ **died** upon the Cross
to free us from **sin** and **the devil**!

The Good News that Christ **rose** from the grave
to free us from **death** and give us the **promise** of eternal life!

The Good News that Christ **ascended** into heaven
to prepare a place for us!

And the Good News that Christ **will return**
and take all believers in him to our heavenly home! ____

This is the message we are called to proclaim *as* Christians

- the message of the **Cross**:

A message of **Repentance** and **forgiveness**!

A message of **Healing**!

A message of the **casting out** demons in Jesus' name
and **experiencing** his everlasting **peace** and **calmness**! ____

*God's **grace** enables us to overcome **fear** and **weakness**; and **go forth** in mission!

The **Spirit** of our Lord will **guide** us and **provide** for us
the **strength** we need to **speak** God's **message**,
even if it is **not** what **some** people want to hear. ____

Go! ... Proclaim the message of the **Cross**!

Boldly tell others about **Jesus Christ**!

Don't **give in** to those who try to **stifle** this **good news** meant to be **shared**!

Don't be like **Herod** who was more interested in saving his **face**

- from being **embarrassed** –
than doing what was **right**. ____

Feel the Holy Spirit **lead** you forth in **mission**!

Feel the Holy Spirit **direct** you in doing deeds of **love** and **mercy**!

Feel the “**Cross of Christ**” being lifted **over** you as you **journey** in its **light**! ____

Follow in the **train** of those who went before you:

Amos, John the Baptist, the Twelve Disciples, the apostle Paul, and many others.

Take up your **cross** and **follow** Christ's example of **unconditional love**.

Don't let the Gospel go **unheard**!

Don't let others tell us we are **not** permitted to **speak** the name of **Jesus**! ____

The **grace** of God will **fortify** you with **faith** and **courage** to **face** your **adversaries**!

When we leave this worship service today, we are entering the **mission field**!

You and I have been **baptized** into the **mission** of the Church,
to **skedaddle** and **proclaim** the Gospel! ____

Led by the Holy Spirit, **go** in peace and **serve** the Lord!

Proclaim the name of **Jesus Christ** throughout this world.

Boldly stand up and announce with **conviction**:

“Jesus Christ is the Son of God!”

“Jesus Christ is the long awaited Messiah!”

“Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior!”

Thanks be to God!”

Amen.