

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.



Mark 6:14-29

All of this background is very interesting and helpful, but my original question remains: Where is the Good News? Perhaps there is none, and this is precisely Mark's point. Just in case we are getting too excited and thinking this business of being a disciple of Jesus is going to be a piece of cake, is going to be a story of ever increasing fame, miracles, and wonders, Mark gives a story of a good man being executed because of weakness, capriciousness, and vengeance.

Year B

Pentecost 7

July 15, 2012

Sunday between July 10 and July 16 inclusive

Proper 10, Ordinary Time 15

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [Mark 6:14-29 The Message](#) or [Mark 6:14-29, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click [here](#) for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the [Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), ". "

Of all the sections of the Bible that the creators of the Lectionary choose to leave out, it is a puzzle to me then why they included this. Where is the Good News? How does our hearing of it edify us? Deepen our being the church?

As usual, Malina and Rohrbaugh (see link below) provide helpful historical background.

Recall that back in Chapter 1, Verse 14, it was the arrest of John that preceded the beginning of Jesus' ministry:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God ...

We hear no more of John until this story, which Mark places after the story of the sending out of the 12 disciples and before telling of their return to Jesus.

[Two weeks ago](#) Mark told us that the gossip about Jesus had risen to reach the ears of two members of the Judean elite, Jairus the leader of the synagogue and an unnamed wealthy woman. But now we learn that even the King is hearing about Jesus. Word of this would, in turn, further enhance Jesus' reputation among the street people - and further increase tensions with the elite.

Verses 14 to 16 foreshadow Chapter 8, Verses 27 to 30, where Jesus asks his disciples for their assessment of him. There, Peter says they believe Jesus is the Messiah; here Herod says he believes Jesus is John the Baptist "raised from the dead." (Which is another foreshadowing of future events.)

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Mark then goes on to tell the story of John the Baptist's execution, and gives us an interesting character sketch of Herod and a glimpse into the social customs of the elite.

We learn that Herod

- is weak – we know this because he is unable to control the behaviour of his wife and daughter. (The daughter does in public what is strictly allowed for family members only. She has revealed a family secret. And to high ranking members of Judean elite. And it is his wife who takes the appropriate actions to restore her honour by having John executed.)
- is easily seduced - we know this because of his fascination with John's teachings and by the dancing of his daughter.
- is impulsive and reckless with the duties and authority of his office - we know this because of his hesitation to have John executed immediately when John first insulted his wife, and because of the extravagant promise made to his daughter.

The only semi-honourable thing Herod does in this story is - reluctantly - keep his promise made to his daughter. Malina and Rohrbaugh comment:

Had he not done so, his officers would no longer trust him.

(Page 171)

The story ends with John's disciples coming and taking his body to "lay it in a tomb" - another foreshadowing of future events.

All of this background is very interesting and helpful, but my original question remains: Where is the Good News?

Perhaps there is none, and this is precisely Mark's point. Just in case we are getting too excited and thinking this business of being a disciple of Jesus is going to be a piece of cake, is going to be a story of ever increasing fame, miracles, and wonders, Mark gives a story of a good man being executed because of weakness, capriciousness, and vengeance.

It's as though Mark is saying to us:

The world is a dangerous place. Not only might you get killed for proclaiming the Good News, you might not even be honourably killed - killed in a direct, open confrontation. Instead you might be killed by stealth, and for totally shameful and trivial reasons.

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The moral of this story then might be:

Proclaiming and doing the Good News of God is not about ego, fame, or honour; nor is it a heroic quest. Our death may come because of totally unrelated, trivial, silly reasons.

Proclaiming and doing the Good News of God is simply about humble service - regardless of the "achievements" or the ending.

The Good News is not about heroism.

David Ewart

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Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, see link below, pages 170-171.

* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

Mark 6:14-29 (NRSV)

¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰ 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. ²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²² 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." ²³ And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then

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the girl gave it to her mother.²⁹ When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

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Mark 6:14-29 (The Message)

¹⁴ King Herod heard of all this, for by this time the name of Jesus was on everyone's lips. He said, "This has to be John the Baptizer come back from the dead—that's why he's able to work miracles!"

¹⁵ Others said, "No, it's Elijah."

Others said, "He's a prophet, just like one of the old-time prophets."

¹⁶ But Herod wouldn't budge: "It's John, sure enough. I cut off his head, and now he's back, alive."

¹⁷ Herod was the one who had ordered the arrest of John, put him in chains, and sent him to prison at the nagging of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. ¹⁸ For John had provoked Herod by naming his relationship with Herodias "adultery." ¹⁹ Herodias, smoldering with hate, wanted to kill him, but didn't dare ²⁰ because Herod was in awe of John. Convinced that he was a holy man, he gave him special treatment. Whenever he listened to him he was miserable with guilt—and yet he couldn't stay away. Something in John kept pulling him back.

²¹ But a portentous day arrived when Herod threw a birthday party, inviting all the brass and bluebloods in Galilee. ²² Herodias's daughter entered the banquet hall and danced for the guests. She dazzled Herod and the guests.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me anything. I'll give you anything you want." ²³ Carried away, he kept on, "I swear, I'll split my kingdom with you if you say so!"

²⁴ She went back to her mother and said, "What should I ask for?"

"Ask for the head of John the Baptizer."

²⁵ Excited, she ran back to the king and said, "I want the head of John the Baptizer served up on a platter. And I want it now!"

²⁶ That sobered the king up fast. But unwilling to lose face with his guests, he caved in and let her have her wish. ²⁷ The king sent the executioner off to the prison with orders to bring back John's head. He went, cut off John's head, ²⁸ brought it back on a platter, and presented it to the girl, who gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When John's disciples heard about this, they came and got the body and gave it a decent burial.

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