

Sermon Proper 10 B  
St. John's Episcopal Church  
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Today's gospel could easily be a movie plot. Who ever said that the Bible was boring?! In a few short lines you have it all- intrigue, confrontation, lust, seduction, drunkenness, revenge and murder. You also have a feisty prophet, a weak ruler, a bunch of hangers-on and a family that could be in therapy for the rest of their lives!

That's today's story. Last week we heard about the call to discipleship and the cost of accepting that call. The cost could well be rejection. Today we learn that the cost could also be death. It certainly was for John the Baptist. And none of this was lost on Jesus or his disciples, many of whom used to be John's disciples. Jesus and his disciples would have understood immediately that by continuing on their path of challenging the religious and political establishment, by continuing to confront the people with power that they were putting their own lives at risk.

John told the truth to Herod. And Herod's wife did not like what she heard. Our gospel says she "had a grudge" against John. Her reaction is clear and unambiguous. But Herod's is not. Herod was mystified by John.

But, Herod was also intrigued by John. Willing, even eager, to listen to him. Herod had John imprisoned, but John was still talking. And Herod was still listening. So, even though John's life was at risk, he still received a hearing. He could still do what he was called to do. Speak God's word even, maybe especially, to the powerful. At whatever personal cost.

Jesus did the same thing. He was very different from his cousin, John. But he also said things that people did not want to hear. We were told last week that his hometown rejected him. We know that eventually the religious leadership found him too challenging and that the political leadership was persuaded of his danger in a world full of insurgencies and anti-government movements. And, so Jesus would eventually be executed by the state.

Speaking God's word can be costly indeed. But, there is more to this story than challenge, fear and murder. At the center of the gospel passage and at the heart of our reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, there is a dance. The gospel's dance is one of seduction and lust- with a beautiful girl and drunken men. And, as we know, it leads to murder. We know this dance well. We know it in our own lives and in the world. We see it on the news, we read about it in the press. It is a dance about the sinfulness within and around us. It is a dance about the manipulation of other people, about

getting our own way, about getting even, about violence to serve our own ends. It is a dance about a weak man who went against his own wishes and killed an intriguing prophet because he didn't want to lose face in front of his friends.

But, there is another dance in our scriptures today. There is the dance of David before the ark of the covenant. David was a mighty warrior, a powerful king, chosen by God and anointed by Samuel. David who defeated Goliath with a sling shot, who defeated King Saul with military prowess, who took the city of Jerusalem by force and made it his capital. A man with enormous prestige and power. A prophet and a singer of songs, a man whose music soothed even Saul's troubled soul. A man to be reckoned with.

And yet today he has stripped off his garments of power and wealth and pared down to his essentials he dances before the presence of God in the ark. I can picture him moving up the hill to Jerusalem, coming to the narrow, winding streets crowded in with dwellings, chock full of people longing to bring the ark home to Jerusalem- to build God a house some day. And David is exultant. In ecstasy. Literally carried away. He swirls and leaps and sways and jumps and no doubt sings the whole time. Taken up in the sheer joy of the moment- the deep and profound encounter with God which has always shaped his life. David is a flawed man, to put it mildly.

Like Herod, David is also a man of lust and seduction and betrayal and murder. But that was not all. David was also a man of profound grief and a man chastened by the prophet Nathan as Herod was chastened by the prophet John. Challenged like Herod to hear God's word and change his life.

What is striking here is that with all his flaws and sins, and all his moral limitations, David was a man taken up in God. A man who had been enticed by the love of God to move into the dance of ecstasy. This is another dance available to us. Offered by God, ready to be taken. A dance of love and delight. The promise of a life steeped in prayer and wonder, gratitude and praise!

The call to speak the truth, to bring God's word to the world is an awesome and fearful call. And it is our call in baptism. All of us. But, equally the call to delight in God and to dance and leap for joy is also a call from God and available to all of us. More than duty marks the prophets of God. More than duty marked the life of Jesus. They were as driven by delight as they were by duty. They were as empowered by their love for God as they were by their responsibility to speak God's word.

They and we are invited to dance. Not the dance in Herod's court but the dance before the ark. Not the dance of revenge and fear but the dance of

sheer joy in the presence of God. The dance of thankfulness and praise. And the good news is that David's dance goes on into eternity. And Herodias' dance will come to an end.

The music is building. The dance is ongoing. God's invitation is offered. Offered to you. "Would you like to dance?"

And so to God whose power now at work in us can do immeasurably more than we can even ask for or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.