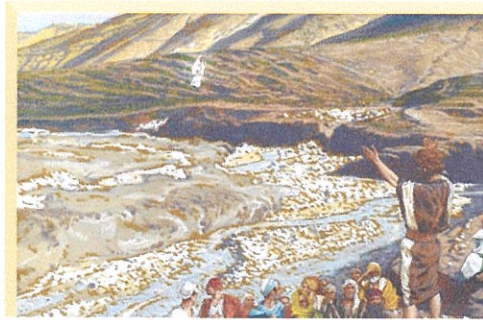


Coop's Scoops # 220 Sunday Worship July 11, 2021



We remember John the Baptist this day for his humble ministry
calling people to the Jordan for the baptism of repentance.

Herod had him murdered, but Jesus pronounced him
the greatest man ever born to woman!

Sentence: The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,
so that you can do it. *Deuteronomy 30:14*

Readings:

2 Samuel 6: 1-5, 12b-19 Psalm 24 Ephesians 1: 3-14

Collect:

Almighty God you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless
until they find their rest in You. May we find peace in your service, and in
the world to come, see you face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who
lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴King 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.”

¹⁷For 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. ¹⁸For John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” ¹⁹And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰for 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. ²¹But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²²When 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.” ²³And he solemnly swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.” ²⁴She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer.” ²⁵Immediately 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.” ²⁶The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Sermon:

On this joyous occasion when we are physically gathered together in worship for the first time in 16 months, I actually hoped for more joyful readings this morning! My disappointment is actually part of the blessing of having a common Lectionary. We do not get to pick the Scriptures to match whatever is going on in our circumstances, rather the Scriptures invade and enlighten whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. We trust therefore that somehow the gruesome account of the murder of John the Baptist has something to say to us as we rejoice in re-gathering. Let’s

begin. We read this day about two dances: that of King David, and that of Salome, daughter of Herodias. One dance appears to have been all glorious, and the other leads only to death and defilement. But at least they are about “dancing”. How I would like to dance with joy this special morning! I have been known to tap dance on occasion! But my daughter suggested that I practice mercy and spare you that spectacle! She wins.

Let’s consider David, dancing for sheer joy and in praise to God. He was celebrating the arrival of the Ark of the Covenant to his Citadel following a long and difficult journey. David was whirling and leaping with all of his might before the Lord. The Lord, however, was not the only one watching. Michal, a daughter of Saul and David’s own first wife, rebuked him. Saying, “You looked like such a fool; a buffoon...making such a naked spectacle of yourself before others.” And David replied that he had danced only for God and not for the eyes of others, and that he would do so again and again no matter what anyone might think. There’s another side to this story, though, and I’ll get to it soon.

On the other hand, the dance of Salome was not danced for the Lord, but rather for her step-father, King Herod. At a drunken celebration in the palace, Salome was asked by her mother to dance the dance of all her might. She did. It was sensuous and beautiful. No one watching called Salome a buffoon, they were too busy ogling and lusting after her. Even Herod watched not with amusement of parental affection, but with lust and great egoism. When Salome finished, Herod promised her anything she wanted, up to half of his kingdom. Crazy, right? Even the lusting, drunken men looking on would be astonished. Salome ran to her mother, and said, innocently, “For what shall I ask?”. And vengeful Herodias told her to ask for the head of the Baptist, on a platter. My granddaughter Claire takes dance classes and does recitals. What kind of a mother would say their daughter needs to see a bloody head on a dish as a reward for obedience and skill in dancing? Salome did as she was told. Herod trembled, for he rather liked the Baptist and enjoyed listening to him. It’s a real cliffhanger. Herod has the authority to say no. Herod’s guests could be expected to understand that such a request should never

have been made. But Herod's pride asserted itself. He would not back down on a promise made in front of his guests. John was dragged from prison, and beheaded in front of them all.

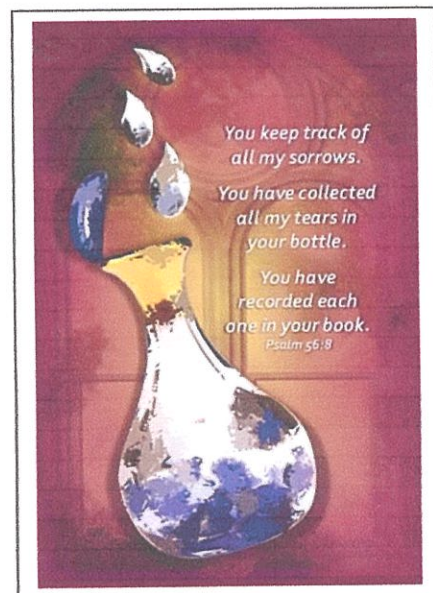
Those are the dancing stories. Now let's look into David's dance a little more closely. Michal, the woman who sounds like such a mighty nag is not actually anywhere as nasty as she appears. And David is not as holy as he appears. You see David has misused Michal horribly for decades. She was his first wife, he was her first love. She supported him totally, saving his life in defiance of her father Saul on more than one occasion. But David tired of her and abandoned her, gave her to be the wife of other husbands, sent her out of the palace and treated her as "not his wife". He never called for her again until she inherited what was left when Saul and all of her brothers were dead. Then David reclaimed her and her wealth, but as one of many wives in a harem. David sinned against Michal mightily when he seduced Bathsheba. Knowing all of that history makes Michal's jibes at David's frenzied dancing a little more understandable doesn't it? And David's pronouncement that he was doing it all for God may have sounded mighty empty to the ears of the woman who had endured David's disobedience to God for at least a decade.

John the Baptist chained in the dungeon had no say in what was going on in the palace at Herod's birthday party. John was so discouraged that he had sent some followers to ask Jesus if He really was the One that God promised; the Messiah. John was questioning things because of His suffering. He was not necessarily seeking deliverance. He did not send a message saying "get a gang of zealots together and get me OUT of here....please...!" What John needed was to know that his current suffering mattered; that welts and bruises and starvation and cold were somehow worth it. They would be with the answer to one simple question "Are you really the One?" John had never doubted that before. Suffering can do that to anyone; it can take away anchors we have trusted for years.

So Jesus sent assurance to John that things were unfolding just as God had planned; that the Kingdom was indeed coming nearer and nearer each day; the works of the Messiah were being done. Therein John found

his comfort. He knew “WHO” he was suffering for; and the “why am I suffering question” became less consuming. As for John, so for us in our own sufferings. Knowing WHO is with us in suffering is far more comforting than any answer to the WHY questions could ever be. So who can help in such situations? Well, Jesus can. Companions who’ve walked where we are now walking can. The example of people like John who suffered for doing good can inspire us. Wounded people like Milcah, whose tears turned to bitterness and rage can be a warning sign to us. And sinner-heros like David, whose behaviours and weakness and sins undo him time after time after time can still cause joy to rise in our hearts as we cheer him on to better things. We must not over-look David’s sins or minimize them. Nor those sins of Herod and Herodias. We must counter truly evil actions and abuse of power at every opportunity. We must still preach the gospel of repentance. We must still cling to God’s merciful forgiveness.

There are so many tears shed in these two stories about dances. Milcah’s tears, and the tears of John’s devoted disciples. Jesus’ tears for His cousin, and those shed later in a Garden called Gethsemene. Do you know that all tears are the same? Salty, wet, and often unbidden. What we do with tears, however, can be very different. We can mix tears with hatred and bitterness, and they will produce only mud...more pain, more suffering. Or we can mix them with love, and they can produce cleansing, healing and new life. Love is the water-softener, the de-salination element for tears that takes the sting out. Remembering “WHO” Jesus is, recalling “WHO” can help, can lead us, in time, **back into joy**. The kind of joy that sets toes tapping again, and eyes twinkling and hearts melting. You never know, tears mixed with love might even lead to dancing! The comforting presence of Jesus can sometimes even change the darkest dungeon into a ballroom.



I can't resist closing with this.... Jesus is here, He is among us. So Brothers and Sisters, shall we dance?"

Prayers:

The Lord's Prayer

Prayers of the People:

As we gather once more in the sanctuary consecrated to your honour and glory, O God, we give thanks for your Presence and Guidance as we continue in our journey to bless others, care for ourselves, and focus on gratitude in a time of pandemic. Without you, we would be adrift on a sea of tears and troubles. We give thanks for all who have toiled, studied, volunteered, treated, taught, and blessed others with their skill and their compassion. We pray for our world, in which many still bear much deeper pain and loss, and much less in terms of vaccinations, hospital care, and access to services. May we be generous with help, and frugal with blame.....may we support each other always with love. We pray for indigenous peoples whose tears for lost children fill many bottles, and ask your wisdom and presence for all who grieve and all who are planning for reconciliation and truth. These things we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer!

Blessing:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all this day and evermore!
Amen.**

- Judie+