

Mark 6:14-29

Today's gospel lines up pretty closely to the things we see in our news...we have a veritable potpourri of sexual lust, seduction, political ambition, scandal, and murder...Plays out like a Greek tragedy...with the King outmaneuvered and cornered into doing something he had no intention of doing...yet it cost John his life.

Corruption, lust and power...glad we have evolved beyond these things today 2000 years later LOL...

Do our leaders today find that they do things they have no intention of doing...only to be forced by shareholders or political constituents or lobbyists... or worse to perform duties which endanger people at the expense of scandals or profits.

Just look at the news and it's all over the place...Our leaders today are often times caught in webs of lies and half-truths to keep the status quo and power...and this can happen to any leader with even the slightest bit of power...perceived or otherwise... to include the heads of families.

This is the story of Herod Antipas (The weaker son of King Herod the great) and Salome (confusedly called Herodias in Marks version of the story)...pawns of an angry mother...and John the truthteller pays the ultimate price for telling the emperor that he indeed had no clothing on...

And as an aside Herod's children after their father died were never ever kings as Rome took back its authority in Israel...in fact at this point the Herod's and their reign of power are beginning to fade out of existence... as all those in power eventually do.

We too can face our own Herod-like social dilemmas...negotiating where we must weigh our own current status quo and power standings and even our own creature comforts against making the right spiritual choices...cause those choices may entail personal risk or pain.

The underlying theme here beyond the drama of life and death, love and hate is once again the head butting of two kingdoms and who gets to have the power. Which kingdom are you gonna choose?!

Here that's the confrontation of political power (the kingdom of man) versus the prophetic voice of God delivered through John (the kingdom of God).

...and by the way this same confrontation will play out later between Jesus and the political powers of Rome and the Jewish Religious Authorities...and who wins that battle?!

Well Jesus we all know winds up on a cross.

So why then are we here talking about losers?!

John and Jesus both literally and figuratively lost their lives to those people in power...and has anything changed?! Speak out truth against an organization, or a corporation or a political figure and see what happens?!

There has always and will always be a struggle between power and truth?! And as Pilate so aptly puts the question to Jesus...so what is Truth?!

See people in power play a different game don't they. Even though their hearts may even be in the right place to begin with...folks are slowly corrupted over time by the system in order for them to REMAIN in power in the system...they start to sell themselves out... and in doing so come to owe favors to others in power...and we see where this always heads and it generally doesn't end well.

I own a video entitled "of/by and for the people". It is a behind the scenes look into the lives of congress folk...regardless of political party.

In it we see that in a newly elected congressman or woman that they are taught fundraising in their very first week...they spends 50% of their political worktime actually just fundraising! Fifty Percent!

As soon as they take office, they begin fundraising for their next election in order to be re-elected.

And the statistics are staggering...the political candidate that spends the most money on their campaign, regardless of their ideals and policies will win 95% of the time. That is in this country Money makes the politician...so even the most pure hearted congressman will become corrupted over time depending on who is pouring money into them if they wish to retain their seat of power.

It literally becomes the golden rule...he who has the gold rules...everything else is just an illusion.

Take any kingdom of man regardless its label: Democracy, Socialism, Communism...they all came about as a better way to order our common lives together...and they usually follow a revolution by the working class.

Yet over time they all drift into the realm of a disguised oligarchy...that is the rich govern and create laws to maintain their status and power at the expense of everything else...our country is politically in that camp right now regardless of what party you may support.

So how do we break this cycle here in the kingdom of man?

True Christianity favors the collective whole...not anyone group, or tribe, or person. True Discipleship is a focus and intention to the ideals expressed by Jesus to His followers...they are summarized in the Beatitudes and are focused on those things that are about a kingdom that is greater and lies beyond anyone's lifetime.

God's kingdom is relational and familial in nature...a kingdom of diversity that fosters differences... but also recognizes that we are all just siblings of the same Universal Parent!

And that in the end... of all our lives...and of all our kingdoms of power here on earth... that the only true and real authority and power lies with God... and not with any one of us... to include any one tribe...or even any single way of thinking.

We are all connected to a source that transcends our time and place.

That's why we are still here following the losers...Jesus and not Rome.

Jesus' kingdom transcended His physical lifetime and although in the kingdom of man...both John and Jesus lose their physical bodies...the fact remains that their truths are still relevant and speaking to us right now today!

That is truth...truth that is eternal and not linked to a single human perspective or a single human lifetime.

Most mystics come to see this truth and when they do...they are usually blown away! It's like living your whole life on a river and then one day finding out that that river feeds the ocean...when you see the ocean and connect the dots you come to see and know the greater truth.

Our challenge then is to speak Divine truth to those who would use their power for their own benefit at the expense of everyone else or the world.

...but know that speaking that truth comes at great risk depending on what level of power you butt heads with. In working with Generals and Bishops I am all too familiar with the sometimes consequences of speaking truth to power...it may even cost you to lose your head!

In order to keep my head... I have learned the subtle art of seed sowing...for the kingdom of God is like a seed... a weed to be precise. Sow the truth and it will take hold...but it's gonna take time...

Those seeds are the word of God as spoken by Jesus...and that is ultimately divine truth...and by the way that universal truth has also been spoken by other prophets of old as well...and also show up in every religion around the globe.

For us disciples of Christ...Sow the gospel and live by it and your actions will cause love to grow in all the cracks here in the kingdom of man.

In today's story what makes this encounter between a king and a prophet so poignant is that Herod, the puppet king to Rome here, actually knows enough about the truth to recognize his own falseness...and instead of a redemption story it plays out as a tragedy where the seduction and machinations of power here are too great for Herod Antipas to overcome.

Remember where else this kind of king vs prophet challenge first played out. The bible story of Bathsheba also entails adultery and bloodshed, prophetic rebuke and tragic consequences, and the breaking and making of the throne.

From his roof, King David sees beautiful Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, bathing, and he sleeps with her. Uriah is summoned from the front to cover for the resulting pregnancy, but when he refuses to go home, the king has him slain in battle.

David then marries the widowed Bathsheba, who bears a son. In response to David's adultery and murder, the prophet Samuel curses David's House, the first consequence being the death of the infant conceived in adultery.

Yet Bathsheba ensures that their second son, Solomon becomes successor to the throne.

In the confrontation to follow Samuel the prophet calls out King David out for having a flock of sheep yet desiring the one he didn't have...so he caused the death of the owner to gain that single sheep using his own power to get it. David is unaware he is being called out and this exchange eventually does have a redemption arc to it...But even Israel's greatest king cannot overcome the corruption of power once

tasted...again at the expense of another's life. Power will always corrupt us in some way...always!

So how then does this play out for us today:

Work vs Life decisions?

Time spent on our self vs time spent on others?

What choices do we make in the face of conflict?

How do we enforce or bend our principles?

How do we save public face when we look in a mirror and see something different?

How do our sons and daughters fight in wars over land, resources and power rather than over basic human rights for everyone?

We can get pulled into all sorts of kingdom vs kingdom issues, can't we?

And it's never so black and white... because as much as we strive to be citizens in the kingdom of God... we also have to live our lives physically here in our carefully constructed kingdom of man.

So how can we navigate these waters? Just remember that the kingdom of man is always founded on power...God created in our image...one or a single tribe benefits NOW at the expense of others or creation.

On the other hand, the kingdom of God is always founded on love...we are created in God's image...everyone or all of creation benefits ALWAYS.

The truth is really not so difficult to see when looked at through the eyes of Jesus's Great commands to His disciples...Regardless of anything manmade just remember to Love God and One another...and in loving all your eternal brothers and sisters... you will eventually come to see the truth...that in the end...we are all just a part of God's One Holy Family!

Your faithful servant,
carmen