



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 11 JULY 2021 – 6th Sunday after Trinity

COLLECT

Merciful God,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love toward you
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 85: 8-13

- 8 I will listen to what the Lord God will say, ♦
for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful,
that they turn not again to folly.
- 9 Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear him, ♦
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Mercy and truth are met together, ♦
righteousness and peace have kissed each other;
- 11 Truth shall spring up from the earth ♦
and righteousness look down from heaven.
- 12 The Lord will indeed give all that is good, ♦
and our land will yield its increase.
- 13 Righteousness shall go before him ♦
and direct his steps in the way.

Ephesians 1:3-14

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ^[a] before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,^[b] having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this^[c] is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Mark 6:14-29

The Death of John the Baptist

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus^[a] name had become known. Some were^[b] 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^[c] 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;^[d] 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^[e] 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^[f] head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then 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.

Reflection from Hannah...

'I didn't mean it to come to this'. Perhaps many of us have found ourselves living with the unintended consequences of something we've said or done? That's the place Herod is in with John the Baptist, in our Gospel reading. This whole passage pre-empts and forewarns us of the circumstances in which Jesus will die. It also enriches our understanding of the more harrowing possibilities that discipleship can bring- remember, just before this passage the twelve have been sent out in pairs to cast out demons and to heal, all in God's power. It's perhaps a little easier to see why Jesus advised them at length about how to respond to a lack of welcome, when we appreciate in the story of John's death just how hard it can be for people to receive and embrace God's message.

John the Baptist is imprisoned because he spoke out about Herod and Herodias' adulterous behaviour. As a consequence, Herodias simply reviles him. But Herod's attitude to John is a lot more interesting- we read that he '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.' Something in John the Baptist drew Herod's interest- and had John lived, Herod's story might also have been very different. This complex relationship with the truth of God's love is one we still find today; people can be intrigued, interested, hungry for more; but also cautious and, frankly, baffled. When we find that- in others, and in ourselves too, last week's passage about greeting rejection with peace can help us have a healthy approach, and Herod's (initial) strategy to keep John's company (albeit in chains) is likewise an encouragement.

But sadly, for Herod, he was too easy to manipulate, and this had tragic consequences. His need to keep up a good public face won out. A similar thing would happen again

with Pilate, when he washed his hands of Jesus and let him be condemned to death. Like Herod, he didn't particularly want to kill a wandering preacher from the Jewish community; but also like Herod, circumstances conspired to manipulate him into using his authority to destroy goodness.

The world hasn't changed much- we may think that it's big and obvious and clear decisions that lead to awful injustices, but so often it is many small human weaknesses that combine in unfortunate and unforeseen ways to diminish God's good creation. And how does God respond? Well, God goes to the depths and is not defeated. As Paul notes in our reading from Corinthians, 'With all wisdom and insight God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.' Though terrible things continue to happen, there is no darkness that can extinguish that hope. Amen.