

Bible study on Mark 6.14-29

Begin with an opening prayer

Almighty God, we praise you
that you show us how to use power wisely.
Help us, as we worship together,
to learn more of your ways,
to understand that our actions have consequences,
and to seek your wisdom in making decisions
that may impact on others.
This we ask in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Read the passage

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

This passage is a departure from Mark's usual narrative style; there is none of the breathy storytelling pace, full of 'and then...immediately'. This is a longer story told in retrospect.

It begins with Herod's guilty conscience. Even the mention of Jesus' amazing ministry immediately makes Herod think that John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. In Herod's troubled mind, at least, there is no escape from John. What follows is a tortuous backstory of self-interest, violence and abuse. It is a clash of spiritual and temporal power. Herod is manipulated into an execution because Herodias is determined to destroy John. She no doubt wanted to eliminate the questions he was raising over her place within the royal household. She is utterly ruthless in making use of her own daughter to request John's head.

Herod comes across as weak and vacillating: he was indecisive when listening to John's preaching; pig-headed when it came to keeping a rashly made vow. He comes

across as the victim of his own whims and feelings, rather than someone who makes decisions based on principles or values.

The role of Herodias' daughter (traditionally known as Salome, from the account in Josephus) has sometimes been interpreted as that of a Mata Hari temptress, choosing to be part of her mother's plot. It makes more sense to see her as an abused minor, the victim of her mother and her stepfather, who is also her uncle.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

Herod's relationship with John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, is intriguing. In many ways, Herod behaved like a modern-day populist leader – he was rash, whimsical and keen to please: which undoubtedly resulted in John's beheading. Where was the wise counsel to Herod to steer him from such folly? His wife and her daughter clearly did not have his best interests at heart when it came to advice. While we do not hold the power of life and death in our hands, we all make decisions from time to time. To whom do we turn for guidance? If to friends or colleagues, how do we know whether or not they are advising us wisely? Do we ask God to give us the wisdom to do the right thing? How do we know what is right?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



- If one falls over, all will – what parts of life sometimes feel like that?
- What or who influences – or perhaps rules – your thoughts and actions?
- How do we make sure that God has a say in our key decisions?

Prayer

A prayer of adoration

Mighty God, we adore you.

We thank you that we can come to you
knowing that you care about each and every one of us,
and all our needs, however big or small.

You created the heavens and the earth.

You put stars into space and filled the mighty seas.

Your power and your greatness is all around us –
from mountain-tops to the intricacies of a tiny flower.

Thank you that your power is limitless.

We are so small in comparison, but you love us all the same.

We adore you, Creator God.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Heavenly Father,

from the very beginning of the Bible,
we see the relationship between word and action –
you spoke and it was so.

As we leave this place,
may we be aware of our words and actions.

May the Holy Spirit guide us,
so that what we say and what we do
builds up your kingdom,
and breaks down barriers.

This we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.