

Pentecost 8 – July 14, 2024
Text: Throw Him a Line
Theme: Mark 6:14-29

Herod in the Gospel before us today is not Herod the Great but rather, one of his sons, Herod Antipas. The kingdom had been divided upon Herod the Great's death and this Herod, Herod Antipas, had inherited the region in which Galilee was. Historically, he was more even-tempered than his father had been and the historians are relatively favorable towards him with regard to his rule, but there was this one thing that caused him no end of problems. In his region was a loud-mouthed, stubbornly committed to God, prophet.

John the Baptist would not give him a pass. He had divorced his wife and married his niece who had also divorced her husband to marry Herod Antipas. John could have just turned a blind eye to whole sordid affair but he would not do that. Men of God are called by God to call out sin. They are called to call out sin regardless of their personal risk. Now more than ever we are living in a world where this story may not seem so strange to us.

Pilate asked the question of Jesus, "what is truth?" This question is still being asked. Is it okay for a boy to identify as a girl? Is he rejecting God's gifts and perhaps suffering from a mental illness called gender dysphoria? Are we going to say something, or just look the other way as though we didn't hear about the issue?

What happens to all those fertilized eggs that are left over after IVF? Is it murder to destroy them or do we just sweep that one under the rug too? What about divorce? Is it a sin to destroy a marriage or is it okay with God when two people just, as we like to say today, grow apart? These are difficult questions to which we know God's answers but, in an effort not to offend anyone and to be inclusive of everyone, we tend to ignore the answers. There are many more; like are we going to say that all bodies are beautiful, and it's okay to be morbidly obese lest we "fat-shame" anyone? Is it okay to get drunk so long as you don't cause a public nuisance or get arrested? See, we're all onboard with John the Baptist nailing Herod Antipas to the wall with his sin, but we don't really want anyone doing likewise for us, nor do we want to have to be John the Baptist for anyone else.

The hardest problem is that our society, bloody head on a platter aside, our society roots for Herod Antipas more than for John the Baptist. Very few people in our broader community would stand up for John the Baptist. In fact, some would say he got what he deserved for not minding his own business, but is that what we are called to do? Are we supposed to mind our own business, live, and let live, or the absolutely ignorant modern phrase that makes me run amok, "you do you boo?" If your answer is yes, we should all just mind our own business, you are wrong.

We are not called to live in isolated little bubbles where everyone can follow his own truth and no one is allowed to call someone else's truth as a lie. How did we get here? How did we get to a place where we're never supposed to condemn sin? Well, that's not totally true. We are called by society to condemn sin, but only things that society defines as sin. In fact, we are essentially ostracized if we don't condemn societal sin, which is usually the polar opposite of what God calls sin. The Church is failing miserably these days because so many Christians, rather than condemning sin have sought ways to make it more palatable. We have mistaken loving one another for pandering to one another's weaknesses. The prophet Amos, in our Old Testament reading is very clear. God's Word is a plumbline. A plumbline is that against which everything is measured to be sure it is true. No matter what it is, if it does not match up with God's Word, it is wrong. Yes, it is a sin to destroy your marriage. It is a sin to do or speak any harm to any neighbor, including Presidents Biden and Trump. It is a sin to get drunk and it is a sin to overload your body with things that are not good for your body whether that be lemon bars or cigarettes or oxycodone. These are sins as identified by the 10 Commandments and our inability to keep them does not let us off the hook for breaking them. They are our plumbline and they are what keeps us moving in God's direction,

not perfectly by any stretch of the imagination, but in the correct general direction.

Pope Francis is sanctioning meetings to discuss embracing the agenda of the LGBTQ community. American Protestants have all but forgotten the Great Commission and have moved on to preventing global warming and gun violence. We are not called as God's people to save the planet. We are not called to make people more comfortable in their sin. We are called to proclaim the love and forgiveness of Jesus but people look at the love and forgiveness of Jesus like someone selling sand on the beach. Who needs love and forgiveness in a world where everything I do is okay so long as I am maintaining my own truth? It is not human nature to deny oneself, so if the Church and the world tell me I am okay just the way I am, why do I need forgiveness? If the Church doesn't make me feel good about myself and the world tells me that love should make people feel good, why would I go to church?

The Church is a refuge for forgiveness but if we have no plumbline, we have no need for forgiveness. If we have no law, we need no Gospel. As difficult as it is, we must stand up against the lies that are told in this world. Like John the Baptist, we too are called by Christ to call out sin. As distasteful as it is, we are living in the results of failing to do so. Paul, in our Epistle for today, tells us

of our eternal inheritance and our promised salvation, but every time we venture away from God's Law, we are like a builder working without a plumbline. We have been corrupted by sin and because we have been corrupted, we do not know what is straight and what is crooked, neither does anyone else. The Law is a gift from God to keep us on the right path, to keep our faith growing instead of dying, to ensure that we arrive in paradise on schedule. Be like John the Baptist and unabashedly proclaim the Law of God. If you saw someone drowning, would you throw him a line, or would you just let him drown? After all he has his own truth and who are we to say that he needs help? If you see someone's faith dying because of their sin, throw them a line. Proclaim the Law. Make him aware of the fact that he is drifting away from God. Maybe they will reject us. Maybe they'll die anyway. But we do what the Lord requires of us. We throw him a line. We proclaim the Law and the Gospel, and we let God deal with what our brothers and sisters do with His Law and His Gospel.