**Mark 6:14-29**

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus’ name had become known. Some said, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.” **15**  But others said, “He is Elijah.” And others said, “He 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 it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because he had married her. **18**  For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” **19** And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, **20** for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly. **21** But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. **22** For when Herodias’s daughter 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 to you.” **23** And he vowed to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.” **24** And she went out and said to her mother, “For what should I ask?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist.” **25** And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” **26** And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. **27** And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison **28** and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. **29** When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

**“Courage To Speak”**

 Let us pray, “God of all comfort, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant the consolation of Your Holy Spirit to all comfortless and afflicted souls. Make us to be rooted and grounded in faith, armed with the breastplate of Christ’s righteousness, furnished with the helmet of an unwavering hope, and provided with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of Truth, by which we shall triumph over all enemies. Amen.” The Gospel reading from St. Mark today is pretty much like watching a head on a collision. If John the Baptizer being beheaded is not troublesome, then we ought to chalk one up for TV numbing us to such violence.

 St. Mark teaches us that God’s Word is at odds with a world in darkness. Since the Church shines with the light of Christ, she draws attention. Both from sinners in need of receiving good news from God, but also those longing to silence the Gospel. As Herod used his position against John, so the abuse of power is still Satan’s number one way to remove God’s saving Word. Rather than trying to solve questions over martyrdom or why the Gospel is rejected. St. Paul turns us to believe what God hides in the cross. He says, “In (Christ) we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will…” God’s will is to give us His Son. Christ courageously speaks His saving Word to whatever haunts our lives.

 Herod had his own way to deal with life, but it still haunted him. When Jesus’ name and work became known, what Herod had put away burst out from the depths of his past. The public rebuke by God’s prophet over unlawful marriage was more offensive to Herodias then himself. He even liked to listen to John, but it had to be on his terms under lock and key in prison. Comprise had led him to this point and Herod was comfortable with the way things were.

 Of course, the grudge held by Herodias was more horrific than he knew. Celebrating his birthday would be forever stained with the blood of John. In the height of his ecstasy and for the sake of his reputation. He had John the Baptizer’s head delivered to Herodias’s daughter. By having it his way all pleasure, glory, and vows became a curse to him. So haunting this ordeal when Jesus came healing and casting out Demons it convinced Herod that, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”

 Our lives are not so carefree as if sin, death, and the Devil do not haunt us. Herod is easy to pick on because his sin is extreme! His failure makes our mistakes seem harmless. However, God’s Word judges without favoritism. His Law slices at the heart of sin no matter the shape or size. St. Paul says, “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (Romans 3:19). None of us beheaded John the Baptizer, but our smallest sins can still haunt our lives.

 Those words, “It is now lawful” speaks to everyone, even us Christians. How like Herod have we used our power as if there is no god but me? Is the Lord’s Name discredited by our actions and words before others? Do we despise His Word and Sacrament rejecting the gifts He gives? Likewise, to dishonor parents and other authorities is lawlessness. To hold hatred and grudges means we are no better than a murder. To take that glance of lust leaves marriage disgraced no less than other ways. To slander a person is to place you over them. To covet reveals how we are never content. Sin haunts us like anyone else and silencing God’s Word only intensifies the pain.

 A better deliverance comes not by the works of men or our judgments. Jesus seeks to deal with troubled lives, but Herod missed such love at work for him. St. Mark shows in the midst of Herod’s dilemma God’s Son along with His disciples casting out demons and healing the sick. Yet, Herod was trapped in the past and fixated on his troubles. He still did not repent even while John prepared him for Jesus. For all his listening, Herod never listened. So He missed out on those words, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

 God always goes out of His way to save. He seeks after the lost, even at His own expense. Herod might have been mistaken when first hearing of Jesus. However, later on he had front row seats before the Savior of sinners. Pontius Pilate during his trial sent Jesus to Herod. “And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him” (Luke 23:11). Rather than troubles with the Law, Herod only saw foolishness from the Gospel in the face of Jesus. God did not miss the suffering of Herod; Herod missed the suffering of God for him.

 Jesus will not let us miss His love for He enters lives to give all hope in Him. Regardless of the sin that haunts you, the burdens you must bear, or the sadness overshadowing your life. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Rather than being caught up in the culture wars that continue to flare up. Jesus still comes with greater works than the Law or any tragedy to face. By His Word, He calls us all to repent for the Gospel gives life in His Name. His forgiveness pours out into troubled lives to heal them. His love goes out bearing the punishment we deserve. His truth cannot be silenced for He died and rose and has the last say against sin, death, and the Devil.

 While Herod feared his sin and the wrath of John. Our baptism tells us to look to the crucified Lord who does not fail. Jesus speaks what needs to be said and His promise is to save. God’s love brings good news to whatever haunts us. Christ longs to dwell in our suffering and does it by His true body and blood. There is nothing to fear, you are holy and blameless in God’s Son. Maybe you are in a bad place right now like John in prison. Maybe sin is consuming your life like Herod. Maybe you see only despair like the disciples who got the body of John. Take heart! No prison is so dark where Christ cannot shine with His promise. No sin is so great that Christ has not extinguished it by His sacrifice. No death is so tragic that Christ has not overcome it by His resurrection.

 As the youth prepare to go away for their retreat. The topic they will hear from us pastors will be on, “persecution.” This is the fact we face as Lutheran Christians in a culture that is dying, lost to self, and has no lasting hope. Such times as these we can cry out, “For your name’s sake, O Lord, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble! (Psalms 143:11)” Let us speak with boldness the call to repentance for our lives and all people. For what God proclaims is rich with grace given in His Son. Christ courageously speaks His saving Word to whatever haunts our lives. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.