

Gospel lesson

We continue in the Gospel of Mark, after Jesus sent out the disciples in pairs to proclaim God's message.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/john-baptist-prison/>;
credit: LUMO

Mark 6:14-29

(NRSV)

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were 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 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; 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 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 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.

The word of God for the people of God

<Interactive Time>



picture from personal creation;
inset pictures from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/john-baptist-prison/>; credit: LUMO

If we had to put on this Gospel story as a play, what character would you want to be? Why?

<Let them respond>

What if you stood before God? Who would you have wanted to be then? Why? <Let them respond>

What about in the Old Testament story, with David dancing, the big parade, and Michal scoffing? Who do you see yourself as, and why? <Let them respond>

They were bringing the ark to the city of David to worship God there. How do you think God would have us approach worship? <Let them respond>

When I greet you each week, saying we are to worship our Awesome God in joy and fellowship, I hope that is the attitude with which you come to church - not because it makes my job easier, but because I wish for you the joy God's grace makes possible in our lives, and the happy, healthy fellowship that comes from living in grace-filled Christian community.

How can we help but respond to grace with our souls singing and dancing in love for God?

<Hymn “Come, We That Love the Lord”

UMH #732>

Message: Gathering for Worship



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/worship-with-rejoicing/eighth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/eighth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty God, we come before you in worship.

As we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we not only seek to gather in Your kingdom, but invite others to come meet You in joy with us. Amen.

We begin the “Worship with Rejoicing” series today with “Gathering for Worship”:

“A worship series about worship: that feels kind of meta, I know...[But] what [does] it mean for us to gather for worship week in and week out[?]....This week, we begin with gathering.”

After communion Sunday last week, I took home communion to those who cannot make it to church. If anyone ever wants to join me on some of those visits, please let me know. I would love for each of you to

see how much it means for our isolated members to know the church fellowship still remembers and cares for them!



picture from MMMS collection

I finally remembered to bring my hymnal with me too. I always try to sing at least a verse or two of a hymn when I visit, because music touches the soul in a way that mere words cannot. Unfortunately, without the hymnal my repertoire is rather limited. So it was really nice to be able to sing 3-4 verses of their favorites.

When singing with David Wentworth (by the way, he says to pass along his greetings and love to all of you!), another resident of the Vets Home peeked in from the hallway. A friend of David's, he was welcomed in to join us in singing God's praise and to partake of communion. He said it was the first time in a long time that he had taken communion, and all of us were delighted with our little gathering in the love of Jesus.

I went to visit Lolita in the Cortland hospital on Thursday morning, and was surprised and happy to see Laura there. As we joined in prayer, I knew God was in our midst. What a joy to gather in Jesus' name!



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/david-ark/>

Not everyone is pleased or joyous to gather for worship. In the Old Testament we heard that Michal despised David for how he leapt and danced before the Lord. In the Gospel reading we heard how even though Herod liked listening to him, Herodias despised John the Baptist, who called people to repent.

Nevertheless, even when people seek to disrupt our gatherings - such as when sports or other events conflict - we need to make time to come together in worship. It is not just good for us as individuals; it builds our community both directly and indirectly in positive ways. Denying God causes problems.

King David stayed focused on worshiping God despite Michal's attitude. Those who gathered with him gained blessings and food, which they were then able to share with their families.



picture screencaptured from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP4GCT6S98M>; credit: LUMO

King Herod focused more on social status and keeping his wife happy. Instead of letting John continue his work, Herod "protected" him by throwing him in prison. This kept John's message private rather than

public; Herod wanted to control it instead of God.

Because Herod did not put God first, he was subject to his wife's sinful manipulations. He tried to be magnanimous with his daughter, and it turned ugly.

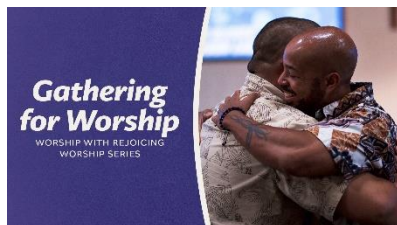
The story of John the Baptist's beheading presages Jesus' death:

- † Like Pontius Pilate, Herod had the power to free his prisoner, but was pressured during the time of celebration into commanding his execution instead.
- † Like the temple leaders for the people, Herod's wife was supposed to give good advice to their daughter, but instead she sought the death of her enemy.
- † Like the people who were to be blessed during the celebration, Herod's daughter got caught up in the sinful call to execute God's servant – and so requested what would be a loss for all involved rather than a boon all could celebrate.
- † The onlookers to this whole affair did not speak against it, presumably reveling in the entertainment.
- † Even the soldier, like those who crucified Jesus, was just “doing his job” efficiently.

When we gather, we can do great good or great harm, much more than any one person can do on their own. What focus do you want your community to have? To

what end are you encouraging your family and neighbors to gather?

Paul wrote to the Ephesians about how we as Christians have been blessed in Christ with grace, forgiveness, redemption, adoption as God's children, an inheritance, and every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. When we gather in the love of Jesus, we see ourselves and one another differently.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/worship-with-rejoicing/eighth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/eighth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

The Holy Spirit helps us to celebrate our blessings and nurture each other instead of fighting over resources and dissing one another. Because we know the source of our blessings, we gather in joy to worship our God.

And in so doing, we are renewed to be a light of God's love, attracting others to gather and learn of our awesome God, to sing and dance and praise God with all that we are, to refocus our entire community and world on the source of all life, beauty, and love: our Triune God, for whom we gather in grace.