

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Sent for Us, Broken for Us, and Saved by Grace

Lesson: Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴ King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" ¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰ because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²² When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." ²³ And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. ²⁵ At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹ On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

(Slide 1) This vacation was special to me and my family for several reasons. Usually, when we go on vacation, we go to L.A., Chicago, or Washington D.C., but this time, we stayed home and fully enjoyed the beautiful Wisconsin in this season. Another reason this vacation was special is because my sister-in-law and niece were with us.

One of the great things about living in Wisconsin is that in summer, everywhere is filled with green grass and blue trees, and there are many lakes. We visited Clear Lake, Willow River State Park, Osceola Falls, Stillwater, River Falls, various places in the Twin Cities, and for the first time, we went north to Pattison State Park to see Big Manitou Falls and the vast Lake Superior. Everywhere we went,

we could see the beautiful natural scenery of Wisconsin, and my sister-in-law said to us, “You are so blessed to live here.” So, I can say to all of you who were born and raised in this beautiful Wisconsin, you are blessed.

Next Thursday morning, they will leave for Korea, and when they leave and the house becomes quiet again, we may feel a bit strange for a while. However, I believe that as we live our lives diligently, we will meet again, whether in the U.S. or Korea.

My wife, sister-in-law, and my parents-in-law are all Methodists. The church they attend in Korea is Saekdong (색동) Methodist Church, and one of the church's characteristics is that every member reads the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation at least once a year. They call this spiritual practice “Tolle Lege,” which is Latin for “Take Up and Read.” They read a set portion of the Bible each day and share the verse that touched their heart on their church's social media.

John Wesley said that the Bible is the primary source of faith. While taking time to pray and serve are all great, I hope and pray that we, too, take time each day to read the Bible. For some of you, reading the entire Bible from beginning to end may seem challenging. For those people, I recommend at least trying to read the Gospels.

The Gospel of Mark begins with the proclamation of John the Baptist. Jesus is baptized by John and is tempted in the wilderness. He then travels with His disciples, healing many people without discrimination. He teaches His disciples and the people through parables.

Jesus healed many people, taught with authority, and won debates with the Pharisees, who were the most learned people of the time. Jesus became famous and people called Him the resurrected John the Baptist or Elijah. As Jesus' fame grew, word of Him reached King Herod.

These rumors made Herod anxious and uneasy because he had killed John the Baptist. He was probably afraid that Jesus, who people were saying was the resurrected John, would seek revenge.

(Slide 2) The story between Herod and John the Baptist is the passage we read today. If you have been reading the Gospel of Mark from the beginning, this story might feel a bit out of place because up until this point, the focus has been on

Jesus. This seemingly sudden and awkward story has a message that the author of Mark wants to convey to us, and we need to recognize what that is.

(Slide 3) According to Mark 6, there was a scandal between Herod and his current wife Herodias. One thing to note is that there are several Herods mentioned in the Bible. However, the Herod in this story is not the same as the one who met the Wise Men. The Herod who met the Wise Men is Herod the Great, and the Herod in this story is his son, Herod Antipas. At that time, the name Herod signified belonging to the royal family and the core power circle.

Just as many people today are interested in the lives and scandals of celebrities, many people then knew about the scandal between Herod and Herodias. However, because of Herod Antipas' power, no one dared to criticize the scandal.

But John the Baptist publicly criticized the scandal. If someone other than John had criticized Herod, they would have been killed, but Herod respected John. He knew that John was a righteous man. So, instead of killing John, Herod imprisoned him.

(Slide 4) However, not long after, at a banquet, Herodias' daughter danced before Herod and pleased him. In return for pleasing him, Herod told her to ask for whatever she wanted. She asked for John the Baptist's head. Though Herod knew that John was innocent and righteous, he had made an oath in front of people, and his honor was at stake. To save face, he had the righteous John killed.

(Slide 5) Friends, doesn't this story remind you of another story? Yes, this story is very similar to Jesus being tried before Pontius Pilate. Pilate was a governor serving under the Emperor. His only concern was gaining the Emperor's favor and advancing to a higher position. To do this, he needed to maintain good relations with the local power structure.

Although Pilate found no fault in Jesus, he crucified the innocent Jesus for his own promotion and power.

Friends, the commonality between Herod and Pilate is that they both knew that John and Jesus were righteous. However, Herod chose his honor over John's life, and Pilate chose his promotion over Jesus' life.

Friends, Herod and Pilate both knew that John and Jesus were righteous. But between their desires and Jesus, they chose their desires. What about you? Can you confidently say that you would choose Jesus over what you truly desire? Are we

any different from them? This story tells us that we are no different from them, that we cannot choose righteousness by our own ability, and that we do not have the power to save ourselves.

That is why God sent His Son, Jesus, to us. Right after the story of Herod and John comes the story of the feeding of the five thousand.

(Slide 6) Jesus took His disciples and a large crowd to a solitary place. When He saw the crowd, He had compassion on them and taught them. Though it was late and they had nothing to eat, they only had five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus had everyone sit down. Mark 6:41-42 says, "Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to His disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied."

Friends, what does the bread mean? The bread means Jesus' body and Jesus' life. Breaking the bread means that His body and life would be broken. For whom? For all of us.

Before Jesus came to us, our lives were like being in a deep sleep. Though our eyes were open, we couldn't discern what was important and what wasn't. Just as Herod and Pilate knew that John and Jesus were righteous but always placed Jesus at the back of their life's priorities, we didn't know what was important until Jesus awakened us. Our lives were miserable. Our lives were hopeless.

However, God, seeing us with eyes of compassion, knowing that we couldn't save ourselves, sent Jesus to us. He was broken for us, to feed us. The fact that Jesus was broken for all of us is very important. Therefore, breaking the bread during Communion is not just for visual effect. It is a very sacred time. During that time, we should silently watch the breaking of the bread for all of us.

How can we express our gratitude? I hope that beyond habitually attending church, we feel gratitude for the love of Jesus Christ for all of us. The Holy Spirit will help us. The Holy Spirit will open our eyes to feel God's love for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.