

Mark 6:14-29

When Herod hears about Jesus, he thinks John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded at the request of his daughter (under influence of her mother), has come back to life. After John's disciples hear of John's death, they take his body and lay it in a tomb. 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." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

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. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 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. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. 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." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." 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." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

COCU47B Readings

How do we use power? How do we speak truth to power? What do we do when we are both "power" and "prophet"? These are some of the questions raised by the Lectionary this week. The challenge we face is to exercise the power we have with justice and in submission to the higher authority of God's Reign, while holding the powers of our world accountable to God's justice, compassion, equality and good management.

The readings today all reflect what happens when realms clash. In the continuing saga of David, the king seeks to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, building his kingdom on his connection with God's Rulership, but his wife, Michal, the daughter of king Saul, whom he replaced, finds the expression of his devotion detestable and mocks him as a result. In the Psalms God is praised as the Creator and "owner" of the earth who calls men and women to come to him in holiness and purity, and who saves those who honour God. In Ephesians the apostle reflects on the new realm of God into which both Jew and Gentile have been invited in Christ, and through which we know adoption as God's children and the gift of God's Spirit. Finally, in Mark's Gospel, human power clashes with God's power as Herod executes John the Baptist out of his own and his wife's anger at John's truth telling prophecies.

It seems that the message of the Lectionary this week is about comparing human rulership and God's rulership. When human leaders become corrupt and set themselves up as the ultimate authority, as in the case of Saul, King Amaziah and King Herod, then God raises up prophets to speak truth and challenge them. But, when human leaders submit to God's authority and seek to bring their rulership in line with God's Reign, as with David and Paul, then they become the voice of God speaking truth to God's people. The issue, then, is not whether we have power or not, but whether it is exercised under the greater authority of God, for the good of God's Reign and God's people. If not, then leaders must expect prophets to come calling. It is important in any organisation, any nation, and on the global stage, that there are those who will speak truth to power. Leadership must always be held accountable to what are essentially the standards of God's Reign – justice, peace, equality, compassion, good management, and the good of the people and the planet. The problem is that leaders all too easily get co-opted into the agendas of special interest groups, and that's why prophets are always necessary.

Psalm 24

A song affirming that the earth is the Lord's, along with all its inhabitants, because God is the one who created it, but only people of purity and integrity are able to enter into God's sanctuary. Then, God is welcomed with open gates.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation. Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory?

The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem in two attempts, the second after hearing how Obed-Edom, in whose house the Ark had been left, was being blessed. Then, as the Ark enters Jerusalem, David dances with all his might, but his wife, Michal sees him and despises him for it.

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a

fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart. They brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the Lord. When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

Ephesians 1:3-14

God has blessed God's people in Christ, choosing us to be holy and to be adopted as God's children, and bringing us forgiveness through Christ, in whom we have also received an inheritance. God has given us the Holy Spirit as part of this inheritance. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.