

Mark 6: 14-29

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.' ¹⁵But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' ¹⁶But 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. ¹⁸For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' ¹⁹And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰for 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. ²¹But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²²When 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.' ²³And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.' ²⁴She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the baptizer.' ²⁵Immediately 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.' ²⁶The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Commentary: Jesus continues to be associated with John the Baptist. He was baptized by John and considered John very highly, as the greatest of prophets. As Jesus' fame was spreading, many thought that 'John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.' Even Herod the king, we are told, began to believe this about Jesus. For Herod, however, this belief did not induce hope but fear, possibly guilt, even a little remorse? We cannot know the mind of such a complicated man who was known for his callous brutality. Yet John had obviously affected him. And even though Herod's ego had caused him to make foolish promises and follow through on the consequences which he appeared to regret, nothing really changed him. But clearly, though John was dead, his spirit with all the power and truth of his message continued to convict and confront many, including even the hardened heart of a hated king.

What does it take to move your heart? Is your ego in the way of the convictions and truths you know deep down must bring change and new direction in your life? Are you too locked-in in lockdown to your present way of life to be open and willing to put it all on the table if 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 14) of God demands it of you?

In this season of Covid-19, lockdown should hopefully not mean locked-in in terms of the ways we are stuck in how we engage others, deal with situations and live out patterns in our lives that are not only unhelpful and damaging, but further exacerbated by the fear and stress of our times. May this season become, in fact, a time to open up space, a time for the seeds of the beautiful flower in us to bloom in a spring-like way, a time to change what should be changed and a time to make deeper peace with what cannot be changed and must be lived with in terms of our expectations of others and of circumstances.

Prayer: We pray for discernment, O God, discernment of what is right and wrong for us right now, and the courage to choose and to act... As you confronted others through John the Baptist, you confront us through others and through our conscience, to live out what we are called to be and do, to discover, to create space, to open doors that have been locked far too long... give us both grace and courage, trust and determination, commitment and peace... In Jesus' name; Amen.