

Amos 7:7-15

Mark 6:14-29

Ephesians 1:3-14

“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.”
AMEN!

Author and pastor Kristin Borsgard Wee
tells of a book on her shelf.

The title of the book is “Texts of Terror,”
by Phyllis Trible.

It’s not a sequel to “Friday the 13th” or
“Nightmare of Elm Street.”

It’s a book where the author
“examines the most awful texts
from the Old Testament.”

You know the ones we wish would
“accidentally” slip out of the Bible’s bindings
and fall into the gap between your desk
and the wall so as to be lost forever!

Most of these accounts never show up
in our Sunday lessons

(thank you revised common lectionary!).

An example of the stories I mean

is the heart wrenching story of
Jephthah's daughter.

Jephthah was one of the judges who
had just won a battle over the Ammonites,
with God on his mind he vowed to give

the first thing he saw come out of his house
as a burnt offering to the Lord.

After his vow was made, out of
the home came his only child.

A daughter, singing and playing a tambourine.

In the shadow of an idiotic vow,
the little girl loses her life.

A text of terror.

Another horrific story from the Book of Judges
is about a woman that was taken by
a group of men to be tortured,
beaten and violated.

When she returned home to her husband,
more dead than alive at the doorstep,
the creep gets angry at her and kills his wife;

cuts her body into 12 pieces and
distributes one piece to each of
the 12 tribes of Israel.

His point was to show the Judges
the injustice happening in the Holy Land!

A text of terror in the Bible.

Who in their right mind would want
to preach about these texts?

The answer is, “No one!”

Thankfully most of those are left out of
the rotation of Bible texts
appropriate for worship. (Pause)

Except for today’s text of terror from Mark’s gospel.
(Pause)

So, before we get into the meat of the text
we must recognize where this occurs in
the narrative.

Mark injects today’s gospel reading in
the middle of Jesus’ sending of the 12 disciples
to go out to cast out demons and
heal diseases.

An event that by most accounts was successful.

That was last week's lesson.

Next week's we will read about their report
to Jesus upon return.

But, for today and during the "in-between" time
of the disciple's being sent and returning to Jesus,

we have a long gospel reading that
doesn't mention Jesus even once,
except in the very beginning when we are

told that Herod Antipas had "heard of Jesus."

You heard me say "Antipas" because the Herod
in the reading today is NOT Herod the Great.

The "Herod" in today's gospel is not Herod the Great.

It is Herod Antipas,
Herod the Great's son.

Herod the Great had been dead for like 30 years.

Antipas had full power in the region.

He was not really a king but a tetrarch
who acted like a king.

He had power to do as he pleased
as long as it kept the Roman peace and
didn't stir up revolt. (Pause)

This kind of unbridled power, as we know,
leads to problematic behavior.

People begin to think they're above the law and
can do whatever they want.

One of the things Antipas wanted was
his brother's wife Herodias.

She may have been attracted to Antipas
and his power, too.

So Antipas divorced his wife in order to steal
his brother's.

It gets even more twisted when we learn
that Herodias was not just his sister-in-law
but also the daughter of one of Antipas'
half-brothers.

Meaning that he was also marrying his niece.

What did it matter to him
that this act broke OT law?

He was “king” and could do whatever he wanted.

There was just one problem.

The problem’s name was John the baptizer and
he had a following.

John spoke publicly against Antipas and
denounced their marriage and his
lack of self-control.

Antipas was angry.

Angry enough to imprison John,
but appeared to be comfortable with
this punishment.

Herodias, on the other hand,
having tasted unbridled power
wanted to send an even stronger message
sent to John and to any others
that might be considering
to follow him.

She wanted him executed but
she knew Antipas wouldn’t approve.

He'd been angry but he showed at
least some conscience.

A person who speaks truth shouldn't be executed,
but Antipas had another weakness, too.

He couldn't give up the selfishness nor
let go of his "me, first power."

He squashed the small voice of conscience in him
and chose to trod down the road of
madness when he sent his guards
to execute John...

All because he'd made an idiotic vow.

So the dinner party turned into a gruesome
and disgusting exhibition showing us what
can happen when people speak
truth to power.

It also shows us what can happen
when people in power don't get
to have their own way. (Pause)

Today's readings are about prophets
and a holy inheritance that the followers of
Jesus are promised to receive,

but they're really about us.

Will we listen to the lessons learned or
continue to trod down those paths
that lead to disgusting behavior?

Am I making a political statement? :-)

It's hard not to when you try to preach truth,
but one must be wary in the merging of
politics and religion because then

we start to think that the answers to our problems
are solved with the posting of
the 10 Commandments in classrooms or
mandatory prayer in schools.

Those mandates are paths that lead to misery
and cruelty because religion is not immune
from greed or temptations which come
from unchecked power.

The mixing of politics and religion will
never lead people to actions of the heart. (Pause)

There is a hint of good news here.

It shows up when we read and recognize
that following John's execution

his followers refused to be intimidated.

His followers carried his vision with
the brave act of coming to Antipas' compound
to recover John's body for burial.

Texts of terror and narcissistic rulers
take their toll but
they never have the last word.

Love always has the last word.

When we encounter innocent people suffering,
we must always respond with love.

AMEN!