

***Grace, mercy & peace from God our Father, & our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Two brothers were born in Georgia early in the twentieth century. They were two of seven that survived infancy, but for the purposes of this sermon they are the ones that matter. In the 1940's one decided that in opposition to the dominant culture of the day, he was going to support and participate in the formation of a multi-racial, multi-ethnic farming community intent on following Jesus' teaching in all things. The other worked as an attorney for a prominent law firm. Both were Christians and attended church regularly. The older brother studied agriculture, but ultimately went to seminary and graduate school; the younger brother studied law, becoming an attorney in a prominent Georgia law firm. ***As the one brother's multi-racial farming community formed, it faced social and community pressure opposing its radical embrace of pacifism and racial equality in all things back in the 1940s and 50s.*** The farm's racially integrated working and living environment invited such severe violence, prosecution, and economic ***boycott during the Jim Crow era of the 1950s that it forced Koinania Farms to the brink of extinction.***

In the 1950s forces opposed to the literal reading and living of the gospel of Jesus expressed at Koinania farms forced them into court proceedings, ***the one brother asked his attorney brother to help out with the legal work.*** The younger brother refused, saying that he could lose his job. The pressure increased to help with a reminder that he was a Christian. The lawyer responded, "*I will follow Jesus to his cross, but it is his cross. I have no need to be crucified.*" ***To this his brother replied, "Then you are an admirer of Jesus, but not His disciple."***

***This characterization – admirer, but not disciple – describes well Herod*** in our gospel reading this morning. Herod it seems is ***blown to and fro by the ever-changing winds of opinion and advantage.*** ***His wife hated John*** for pointing out the obvious – there's something wrong with marrying the woman whose still married

to your brother. But ***the people*** – whose favor and obedience Herod requires to retain his position as Roman Tetrarch – ***thought John the Baptist a holy man and prophet***. For his part, ***Herod liked to listen to John*** the Baptist’s teachings – though he is perplexed by them – but ***when denying his step daughter’s request for the head of the John the Baptist presents the possibility of appearing to waltz on a promise*** in front of the rich and influential at his party, ***Herod executes John without a second thought***. ***Whatever happens to be expedient in the moment*** seems to be the rule of the day for Herod – the rule for everyday ***as his interacts with Jesus during his Passion will expose***.

The issue before us this morning has far reaching consequences. ***Will we choose in the moment the path that is easiest at the expense of what truly matters?*** Are we willing to sacrifice personal comfort and even reputation in service to something greater than ourselves. **For Herod the answer is a clear and resounding “no.”**

The danger presented demands our attention because ***at its very center lies the question at the core of human sin***, “Does anything really matter more than me?”

*What I like – what I want – what is convenient for me – what feels good – what tastes good – what makes me look good or important – what advances my interests: Is this what really matters?*

***The danger here is that we can take this path of least resistance every day for the rest of our lives and end up like Herod – ultimately deposed by the Romans – and seen as nothing more than an opportunist.*** History does indeed remember Herod Antipas, but it remembers him as a vain, pathetic man.

**Our gospel, however, does present us with an alternative.** While Herod is at a party being entertained, **John the Baptist** – the man who speaks God’s truth – languishes in a prison cell below. ***The contrast between the two is***

***as stark as their importance in life.*** Herod has position and power but is a vain, silly pathetic little man; Herod suffers, but has become part of the enduring redemption of the world.

We face the dilemma every day without a sense of urgency, but with profound consequences. ***Do we party or study?*** Do we stay up and browse or binge watch or sleep well so we can be our best for the world? ***Do we stay on our couch or go out and help someone else at the Food Bank or Habitat for Humanity,*** which by the way was founded by the first Georgia brother.

At our moment in history there is ***no greater reality to this dilemma than the question of our response to the environmental catastrophe*** looming over our planet and future generations. ***Will we follow the urgency of personal desire like wailing infants thoughtlessly demanding what is easiest, most comfortable and convenient*** – follow the pack and drive SUVs; ***throw away 100 paper plates, plastic bags, straws, or paper cups***; turn up the air conditioning, the heat, the leave the lights on in every room; ***drive our cars everywhere alone thoughtlessly***; surround ourselves with pointless possessions we don't need, that end up in landfills; ***eat food that is produced in an unsustainable, inhumane and wasteful manner and then shipped across the country or world so we can have what we want at any given moment.***

***Or will we will take the fate of our planet and future generations seriously and make meaningful, deliberate, even sacrificial changes in our lifestyle:*** learn to take the bus or walk; ***learn to wash a plate or cup or bowl or reusable storage container***; open the windows when it's warm or put on a sweater when we're chilled; ***use vehicles in a deliberately and mindful of the environment***; only buy what we really need and throw away what we absolutely must; ***eat what is produced locally, seasonally, sustainably – as everyone used to do.***

The choice stands before us: ***Will we be remembered as the people who thoughtlessly chopped John the Baptist's head off?*** Or ***remembered as prophets*** –

*the people who know what is important, and willingly makes the sacrifice necessary for the sake of the planet, the world and our children.*

*Remember, Jesus also stands before Herod – or is it Herod that stands before Jesus? Herod makes the choice for himself, yet again, but **Jesus refuses to do extricate***

***Himself from danger by pandering to Herod.** He willingly gives His life for the sake of the world, thinking not of Himself, but of us. Jesus doesn't choose His life, but our life together.*

*Inevitably, life honors not those who do what is best for themselves, but those who do what is necessary, what is right, what gives life. This day, the gospel here invites us to look closely at success ... **and then choose significance as we follow Jesus on his way.** Remember, Jesus says rather often:*

*"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (8:35).*

***Christian faith is more than knowing about Jesus; more than admiring Jesus; more than just gladly hearing the Word. Herod had done all that, but the Word sown in his life did not bear fruit.** The cares of this world choked it out. Christianity is not knowing *about* Jesus, it is about knowing God as revealed in Jesus. It is about having a relationship with God through Jesus and nurturing life in the world.*

*Those brothers from Georgia are Robert Henry Jordan and Clarence Jordan. **Robert Henry Jordan became a justice of the Georgia Supreme Court.** He did it to be recognized, and yet for the life of me and the internet **I could find out nothing more about him or his accomplishments.***

***Clarence founded Koinania Farm, was a leader in the civil rights movement, was spiritual mentor and friend to President Carter, and founder of Habitat for Humanity.** He did none of it for himself and died at 57, but 50 years later the world still remember him as a person that made a difference and changed the world.*

*Amen !!!*