

Adult Teaching Resources

July 14, 2024



Mark My Words

July 7, 2024—“Home and Away”—Mark 6:1-13

July 14, 2024—“The Death of the Party”—Mark 6:14-29

July 21, 2024— “No Rest for the Weary”—Mark 6:30-56 (RCL 6:30-34, 53-56)

Some Things Never Change

July 28, 2024— “The Miracle Man”—2 Kings 4:42-44

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The Death of the Party

Mark 6:14-29

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." (Mark 6:16)

Opening

After everyone arrives ask each person to find a partner. Once each couple is settled, have everyone consider these questions.

What is easy for you to talk about? Why is that?

What is difficult for you to talk about? Why is that?

What is almost impossible for you to talk about? Why is that?

What good comes out of the difficult things to talk about?

Give each couple time to share with each other, then open the floor for conversation and discussion before moving to today's difficult Bible passage.

Reading the Bible

What were some saying about Jesus? ("John the baptizer has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him.")

What were others saying about it? ("It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.")

What did Herod say about it? ("John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.")

What did Herod do to John? (He sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison)

What had John been telling Herod? ("It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.")

What did Herodias want to do? (she had a grudge against him and wanted to kill him.)

How did Herod feel about John? (He 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.)

When did his daughter Herodias dance for Herod? (At his birthday banquet)

What did Herod swear to her? ("Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.")

Reading the Bible *continued*

How did Herodias respond? (She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?”)

What did her mother tell her to ask for? (“The head of John the baptizer.”)

How did Herod respond? (He was deeply grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her.)

What did the king do? (He 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.)

What did the girl do? (gave it to her mother)

What did the disciples do when they heard about it? (they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.)

Making Connections

What stories can you recall where someone was imprisoned because their philosophies, ideologies, or way of life threatened the “status quo?” Who was in power? What was the threat? What ultimately happened?

How much power do we give others over us? Why do we give up so much control? What kinds of trouble can we get into when we do that?

What is your response when someone speaks or acts against your leadership (wherever you might lead—the house, the church, your job, a group of friends, your neighborhood, etc.) What do you want to happen to them?

When have you spoken the truth in a risky situation? What was the situation? What was the truth? Who needed to hear it? How was it received? What happened to you?

Have you ever made an offer out of the goodness of your heart, and then have someone take advantage of your offer and hold you to it? What was the offer? How were you taken advantage of? What did you learn from that situation?

Our Lesson Writer explains, “Mark adds urgency and emphasis to the bloody act by saying “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” (v. 25, emphasis added). The demand that it be done “at once” suggests that she expected it to be presented during the party, like a grisly birthday cake.” What does this request and the urgency of it being carried out say about Herodias? How do you think Herod felt when this was the request? Do you think the request was “fair?” Why do you say that?

Why do you think this story is included in Mark’s gospel? What does the beheading of John have to do with the good news of Jesus?

So What?

Have everyone join together with their partner from the beginning of the lesson. Once each couple is settled, ask them to pretend they are the ruling body for a country. They have final say over all the people and they write and erase the laws as they feel they are needed.

If they do something wrong in the eyes of the current law(s) or in the moral and ethical realm, what should be their consequence?

When is it okay to change the law for their own personal benefit?

How far are we willing to go to remain on the throne and please the powerful people around us?

Give each couple time to share their thoughts with each other on those questions. Then, ask these questions for the larger group to consider.

How are we a part of the system that holds others down and keeps others from advancing? Who are those “others” we talk about?

What is our responsibility, as people of faith, to uphold justice and look after more than just ourselves?

If you had been in Herod’s shoes, what would you have done with John the Baptist? Why do you say that?

The Challenge

This week, as we interact with others, pay attention to how we treat others. Are we doing things and saying things that are positive and encourage people to move forward, or are we doing things and saying things that keep people where they are or even move them backward?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the courage and faithfulness of John the Baptist. He lived by your word and tried to live the right way, preaching truth and living the truth. May we do our best to follow his example. And when we bump up against those who don’t want to hear the truth, may we have the courage to face the consequences of our actions. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The Herods—The Herod family began with a powerful but cruel and paranoid ruler generally known as “Herod the Great” because of his many impressive building projects. Herod killed anyone he suspected of trying to supplant him, including his favorite wife, Mariamne, and several of his sons. Herod was of Idumean extraction, but his family had converted to Judaism, so he was technically Jewish, and ruled Palestine as a client king of Rome from about 73 BCE until 4 BCE.

After Herod’s death, most of his kingdom was divided into territories assigned to three of his surviving sons, who were technically known as “ethnarchs” or “tetrarchs” rather than kings.

Herod Phillip was given control of Iturea and Tracheonitis, Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and Herod Archelaus was given control of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. Archelaus proved so cruel and unreliable that he was deposed and exiled in 6 CE, when his territories were turned into a Roman province ruled by appointed governors, including Pontius Pilate.

Iturea and Tracheonitis, controlled by Herod Philip, were north and east of the Sea of Galilee. Herod Antipas was given control of Galilee, which was west of the Sea of Galilee, extending as far north as Lake Huleh and south to include the Jezreel Valley. Perea was located east of the Jordan, from just south of the city of Pella to midway of the Dead Sea. Samaria, Judea, and Idumea (from north to south) were located west of the Jordan and south of Galilee.

Machaerus—The fortress known as Machaerus stood on a mountain ridge on the northeast side of the Dead Sea. It was first built by the Hasmonean Alexander Jannaeus around 90 BCE, but destroyed by the Roman general Pompey’s army in 57 BCE. Herod the Great rebuilt the fortress around 30 BCE. The well-defended compound could have doubled as housing for the king when visiting Perea, including appropriate living quarters in addition to its military function.

Josephus —Josephus’ account of John’s arrest is found in his *Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII.5.2:

Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. (From *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, translated by William Whiston, available online from Tufts University).

Digging Deeper *continued*

Who was this girl?—A textual problem raises questions with the translation of v. 22, and the identity of the dancing woman. What appears to be the best text, adopted by NRSV and NET2, identifies her as Herod's daughter Herodias. Some later texts, including the influential Western text favored by the KJV, identifies her as “the daughter of Herodias,” his wife (KJV, NIV11). Since the girl went and asked “her mother” what she should ask for, the latter identity seems most likely despite the preceding text.

Josephus recorded a lengthy and sometimes difficult-to-interpret genealogy of Herod the Great's various wives and descendants. He calls Herodias' daughter Salome, the name she is given in various imaginative retellings of the story, in which her performance was transformed into the seductive “dance of the seven veils.” (*Antiquities* XVIII.5.4).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Why does Mark devote so much attention to this story?

Given Mark's typical brevity and fast-paced style, readers may find it surprising that he paused to relate the account of John's death in such detailed fashion that both Matthew (14:1-12) and Luke (3:19-20, 9:7-9) abridged it.

Several things may be at play. Mark had linked the beginning of Jesus' preaching activity with John's arrest (1:14), and now he connects the disciples' preaching mission with John's death. This is made especially clear when we note that the sending of the Twelve (vv. 7-13) and their return (v. 30) serve as brackets around the story of John's death (vv. 14-29).

From another perspective, the account of John's arrest and death may be an intentional foreshadowing of Jesus' own death. Both were arrested by rulers—Herod by John and Jesus by Pilate—who were intrigued by their captives and did not want to execute them. Both, however, were pressured into doing so by the hostile intentions of others. Both Herod and Pilate are portrayed as rulers who become unwitting pawns in a game much larger than they anticipated.

The comparison between John and Elijah may also be strengthened by similarities in their stories. Antipas can be seen as reflecting the hapless King Ahab, who feared Elijah but sought to kill him because his wife Jezebel was furious that he had killed the prophets of Baal, which she supported (2 Kgs. 16:29-19:3). Antipas had a healthy respect for John, but his wife Herodias, the target of John's criticism, was determined to see his head on a platter.