

Sermon: Pentecost 8

The Rev. Mike Wernick

July 15, 2018

Year B
2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19
Psalm 24
Ephesians 1:3-14
Mark 6:14-29

Contrary to popular belief... you can't be hypnotized against your will... though there may be some people who want to be but are in denial... contrary to popular belief... no one can make you feel anything... they may know what your buttons are... and when you're stressed or tired... they may push them long enough and hard enough until you are worn down... and you react instead of act... contrary to popular belief... when someone offers you a gift... you're not obligated to accept it... but some gifts come with strings attached... and accepting them turns them into contracts... and contrary to popular belief... offering some gifts... or not following through once they're offered... can come with shame...

In the fall of 1971... after I turned eighteen... a friend of mine came to visit... I met Carol a few months before... on my trip to Israel... we lived in northeastern New Jersey... and she lived in southwestern Connecticut... and while she was visiting... my aunt and uncle had all of us over for dinner... my uncle Shel was a successful business man... and thought highly of himself... and was a show off... and after dinner... he pulled a \$100.00 bill out of his wallet... and offered it to Carol... held it out towards her... my uncle was kidding... teasing... of course... he was not serious... it was his idea of a joke... but at someone else's expense... I knew he was kidding... I knew him... but Carol didn't... and she just reached right out and snatched that crisp \$100.00 bill... and must have felt... really... fortunate...

I felt a bit panicky... far as I could tell... she fully intended to take that \$100.00 bill back with her and fortify Connecticut's economy... my uncle said he was only kidding... I said he was only kidding... Carol pretty much said... too bad... you gave it to me... and now

it's mine... and it took some wrangling... it took some real wrangling... it took what seemed to be many beads-of-sweat-on-the-forehead minutes... to convince Carol... to return that C-Note... back to the wallet... from which it had come... my uncle had set himself up... though he was not willing to lie in the bed he had made for himself...

My uncle had set himself up... though like Herod... he sowed some seeds that he wanted someone else to reap... and like Herod... he made a kind of a promise... in front of his guests... that he did not want to keep...

It would it have been better if my uncle acknowledged how wrong he was... how stupid he was... for making that offer in the first place... instead of implying that Carol was wrong for taking it... it would have been better if he asked his guests to forgive him... because he was sorry that he really could not follow through with the offer... it was just too much...

Or maybe... in this particular case... it would have been better if he had honored his word the way Herod did... as a way of learning his lesson... just as it would have been better if Herod did not honor his word... as a way of learning his lesson... but either way... it would have been better if both he and Herod weren't show offs... it would have been better if they could have named the inner brokenness that motivated them to make such promises... without... even... thinking... and come to terms with it... it would have been better if they realized that it was the False Self... that had been speaking through them... and not their True Selves...

But both of them... wedged themselves between rocks and hard places... and when Sheldon refused to let go of that \$100.00... he painted himself into the Corner of Shame... because in the eyes of us present... his integrity was called into question... and when Herod refused to let go of his promise to give Herodias' daughter whatever she asked for... it was because he didn't want to be painted into that same corner...

even though it meant John's head on a platter... Herod couldn't risk having his dignity called into question... but his dignity came at the price of another's life...

And as Pearl Maria Barros... who teaches religious studies at UC Santa Clara... wrote... *although most of us might not like to admit it... we are a lot like Herod... we are fascinated and inspired by the prophets of our day... but we often lack the courage to follow their lead...*

Last week... we heard the story about Jesus sending the disciples out two by two... to heal... and to cast out the demons which divide and accuse... he ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff... no bread... no bag... no hundred dollar bills in their belts... but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics... we heard Jesus say... *prophets are not without honor... except in their hometown... and among their own kin... and in their own house...*

The hospitality the disciples might receive... was not going to be like Herod's banquet... and I have to wonder... whether Herod's banquet had any resemblance to the Heavenly Banquet... because the banquet we want to get in to... is the one that wants to keep us and others out... and that's partly why we want to get in... so we can feel better than other people by keeping them out... in Matthew 23:13 Jesus said... *woe to you... scribes and Pharisees... hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven... you do not go in yourselves... and when others are going in... you stop them...*

And in Matthew 18:3 he said... *truly I tell you... unless you change and become like children... you will never enter the kingdom of heaven...* you see... children have no guile... they don't contrive... they don't come into the world knowing hatred... or judgement... these are things they learn... and learning them well... puts them out of touch... and the Gospel doesn't stick... the Good News of the Gospel doesn't stick... what they learn is how to use the Gospel to advance their own myopic agenda... what

they learn is how to focus on one or two passages to support the position they want to take... but there is no comprehensive understanding that the Good News is for all people...

Over and over... Jesus talks about the Kingdom of Heaven being near... about the Kingdom being here... so what if the Kingdom of Heaven... isn't a place... with space time coordinates... what if the Kingdom of Heaven is a state of being... a state of being that enables us to experience unity instead of division... to know that diversity was never intended to be divisive... to love and affirm all people for who and where they are... even as we all continue to learn from our mistakes and grow and become...

But what if the Kingdom of Heaven radiates from the inside to the outside... from our hearts to the hearts of others... what if the Kingdom is a banquet at which there is no social standing... no minimum income... no dress codes... where all are welcomed... and fed with the food and encouragement they need to excel... because the evil in the world... arises out of the barriers we erect... and the judgements against each other that we make... and against the prophetic voices of people like John the Baptist... and Jesus... who spoke of being One with the Godhead...

Presbyterian minister Moffett Churn writes... *You can put your ear to the ground and listen for as long as you like... but you will not detect so much as a single note of Good News in today's story. It's where the story shows up that makes it a must-read. It comes just as Jesus puts his disciples on the same collision course that he is on. If this story is about anyone, it's about us. In an all-points bulletin to disciples, then and now, just in case we're getting full of ourselves and thinking that following Jesus is going to bring us glory and advantage and ever-increasing success, Mark says: Think again. Following Jesus might get you in hot water up to here...*

So let us pray... that when we're about to sacrifice our values... or our integrity... or someone's prophetic voice... someone who speaks truth to power... when we're about to sacrifice those at the bottom... and serve them up on a platter at the expense of God's agenda... so others can implement their agenda to stay at the top... let us pray that we have the conviction to say... *Stop... I was wrong... I ought not have made that promise to my step-daughter... after all... it was only a dance... or offered up a C-Note I really didn't intend to give... even if it means sacrificing part... or all of ourselves... so we can enter back into the beloved community... which is already here...*

Mike+