



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴King Herod heard of [the disciples' preaching,] 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."

¹⁷For 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 John 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.

Sermon by Rev. Stephen Cook, Synod Minister

July 11, 2021

The first rule of holes is, “When you are in a hole, stop digging.”

Herod was in a hole, and he knew it. He thought his order to beheaded John the Baptist was the way out. He gave the order out of fear of looking weak and foolish to his family, and the officials, and the public.

He had given his word and couldn't back down. He was a man of his word. He couldn't look weak. Before this Herod had feared - even admired - John. But John's preaching - "*It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife*" - had offended Herod's new wife – his former sister-in-law.

So, Herod knew he would have no peace in his household or kingdom until John was silenced.

Herod had *the authority* to arrest troublemakers, to put them to death, so that's what he did to John. It was politics as usual.

Yet Herod had a difficult time shaking what he'd done to John. So, when Herod hears that Jesus and his disciples are out preaching and healing people, he becomes horribly uneasy.

But the problem gets worse, the hole gets deeper: *Jesus and his disciples have picked up John's message. They are calling for repentance.* Remembering his sin, Herod is afraid. *Is this Jesus actually John the Baptist, raised from the dead?*

That is a problem. Herod can't repent. He can't afford to admit his mistake. If he repented, he'd be judged by his new wife, his daughter, and his subjects. Most dangerous of all, he would be judged by his Roman masters. He would be lost.

However, this is the least of Herod's problems.

Herod is in a hole with God.

Herod's inability to repent places him under God's judgment. Unrepentance equals death for Herod – and for us.

We all come under God's judgment when we fail to repent. Herod is in a hole with God. So are we.

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The first rule of holes is to stop digging. But that is not as easy as it sounds.

“Have you heard that thing about (fill in the name of your least favorite public person here)?

Can you believe it?”

Well, yes, I can. I know human history. I'm a Christian and I know my bible. I also know my own heart.

It seems that we are constantly digging ourselves into holes, often without realizing it, and often with the best intentions.

The nature of human life is to dig holes for ourselves and not know how to get out.

Or we do know how to get out – but the cost is too high.

Like the cost was too high for Herod.

I want to say to Herod - *“You can do the right thing here – the thing that God requires of you.*

You can sober up and say, ‘NO!’”

All it will cost you is your marriage, your family, your status, power, and position. They’ll get out the knives and come for you.” Can you believe it? I can. Truth be told, I’ve been in holes like that myself.

The hardest thing in the world to do is admit, “I said that, did that – but I’ve changed my mind. I think differently now. I was wrong. Please forgive me.”

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Herod is in a hole with God. That would have been good news for him, if he had only trusted it.

Herod is not dealing with a reincarnated prophet. Even if John had been raised from the dead, he couldn't have saved anyone from God's judgment.

Herod is dealing with God's only Son, Jesus of Nazareth

This Son not only has the mission to preach repentance to sinners but the authority to forgive these same sinners.

Jesus does what is necessary to fulfill his kingdom's calling. He makes believers out of doubters; and he does so even when it means his own death.

*If you want to repent, if you want forgiveness – if you want out of the hole your life is in – **you need to die or find someone to die for you.***

That is the promise Herod misses.

When the Word enters our homes and hearts - just like Jesus and his disciples entered villages and houses with the good news - it gets up close and personal.

It comes into our homes and hearts – into the holes we’ve dug - to remind us that Jesus bore the weight of God's judgment for each one of us personally.

This personal word for you and me is a transforming word - meant, not just to be heard, but to be received deep in the heart where it can take root and grow.

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Herod liked to listen to John, but never took his words to heart. When he found himself at the bottom of his hole all he could think to do is keep on digging. He admired John - but didn't follow him.

We listen to Jesus and take his words to heart. *We know that our Lord plans to make us more than his admirers; with his Promise he is making us his disciples.*

And as recipients of his kingdom - which transform doubters into believers and sinners into disciples - we act unusually. We can stop digging the holes which are really our graves. Rather, we face tough questions and situations, ready to risk our own status, our safety in this world - even placing ourselves under the judgment of others - in order to follow Jesus. In the Church – the only body God has in the world – we can say, “I see myself, you, my neighbor, and all of creation differently now.”

Try it! It will change your life!

And let the Church say---

+AMEN+