

Proper 10 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity - July 11 Amos 7:7-15;  
Psalm 85:8-end; **Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to You, O Lord, Heavenly and Glorious God

On YouTube, I found a video of a song, written and sung in Russian by Simon Khorolskiy and friends: Heaven is my Native Home. [I have asked Jonathan to put the link in the chat.] I imagined John the Baptist singing it. Here are a few words: *Heaven is my native home. My loving Father's there. I am a stranger here. Darkness around and fear. Sorrow is always near... And if I suffer hard...heaven is my home! I will not question God. Christ suffered even more and promised to adorn me with a crown of gold. Life is as short as a blink. My Spirit longs for heaven – there is my home! God's people over there...With them I will rejoice. Praise Jesus with my voice... before his holy throne...Heaven is my home! Hallelujah! Amen.*

I found the song helpful when considering today's readings due to the contrast between them. Mark's Gospel is unsettling and gory. St. Paul's letter to the Church in Ephesus is glorious and hopeful. Paul's words were music to the ears of people persecuted for their faith in Jesus and who knew of Herod's cruelty. Today we need to hear such uplifting and hopeful news as we battle the challenges of our own bigger picture. Here, for example, is a possible tabloid headline reporting today's Gospel story: *'Wronged mother uses teenage daughter to abuse the truth while drunken husband makes an offer she cannot refuse.'*

This sounds outrageous! It is meant to. This is why Mark tells us his version of events in such graphic and ugly detail. He paints a picture of Herod, the earthly King, as having values poles apart from Jesus, Heaven's King. We need to know this. We are meant to be outraged that Herod appears to be 'in control' of John's life when, in truth, he is not. Mark tells us, for example, that Herod creeps down to the dungeons to listen to John, as if John was his own personal spiritual guide: *'Herod respected John, knowing that he was a good and holy man, and...he was disturbed whenever he talked with John, but even so he liked to listen to him.'*

I attended the Lay Ministers' relicensing service in Portsmouth Cathedral last Saturday. I listened to our Commissary Bishop, Rob Wickham, say that, despite John's clothing and food tastes, he had managed to create a safe space for people. As they walked to the River Jordan and reflected on their values they were led to a place of repentance, in readiness for baptism. Maybe Herod had tried to create a safe space, in the dungeon, listening to John. He may have eventually repented. Mark however cuts Herod's faith journey short by revealing the depths of his weaknesses and foolhardiness in believing he was in control of events. In this way, Mark unleashes the contrast, the mystery and paradox of life, that what we think should be is not what God prepares and plans for; *what we think should be is not what God prepares and plans for.* Herod had, in fact, grossly under-estimated the hatred simmering under his new wife's demeanour and of how she would use her daughter.

Not only that, when Herod heard about a new preacher and healer in town he shouted, '*It's John the Baptist who has been raised from the dead. I know because I killed him!*' Herod, the earthly King, openly acknowledges that he murdered John, re-visiting his worst and secret fear – that he had killed the wrong person in circumstances he could not undo! Herod's birthday was John's death day!

This is even more poignant when we think ahead...Herod did not repent of his behaviours or pay for his crime because he goes on to have a hand in killing the real wrong person when he hands Jesus back to Pilate.

Death, even horrific death, is sadly part of life. All death is tragic because life is precious and sacred but if 'Heaven is our native home' we at least have the opportunity to accept the contrast Mark skilfully weaves through such outrageous events, that there is another perspective; *there is another perspective*. Looking through St. Paul's eyes we can see this perspective in his uplifting words; we hear him clarifying who Jesus was and the power of what he did for you, for me and even for the Herod's we know of and continue to be outraged by two thousand years later. St. Mark and St. Paul, in their different ways, expose us to the completely outrageous Love of God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who, through the cross of death and life, offers us, through the Holy Spirit, continuous forgiveness, mercy, grace and peace beyond all understanding because Heaven is our native home!

A prayer using Paul's words:

<sup>11</sup> ... because of what Christ has done, we have become gifts to God that he delights in for, as part of God's sovereign plan we were chosen from the beginning to be his, and all things happen just as he decided long ago. <sup>12</sup> God's purpose in this was that we should praise God and give glory to God for doing these mighty things for us, who were the first to trust in Christ. <sup>14</sup> God's presence within us is the guarantee that God really will give us all that was promised; ...and this is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God.' Amen

Link is here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=on7VPe\\_SG7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=on7VPe_SG7s)