

Reflections for 11th July 2021

6th Sunday after Trinity

Love one another

The Gospel reading for this Sunday seems rather bizarre in our current way of thinking. King Herod had promised half of his kingdom to his daughter for her dancing and with the connivance of her mother she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod was unhappy with John the Baptist after he had been told by him that his marriage to his brother's wife was unlawful. Nevertheless, Herod had not wanted to kill John who he believed was a holy man and he enjoyed his company despite putting him in prison but, after making a promise to his daughter, he felt bound to honour it. Perhaps part of the problem was to do with the power of an omnipotent King.

Then Jesus came working wonders by healing the sick, feeding thousands and so on. Who was Jesus, was he John the Baptist come back to life? Did Herod want him back to life? Could anything like this happen today and what did Herod do wrong? Is this really so bizarre?

The answer to the first question seems to me that he made a rash promise to his daughter. We can perhaps think of reasons why the promise should have been rather less open ended and second reasons why he should not have given in to the request. But having made the promise, honouring it is not a really bad habit to have.

A promise is a promise. However, asking for something illegal is unreasonable and the request clearly should have been refused. Herod already had broken the law marrying his brother's wife so was not one to worry about breaking the law further, after all he was the king. We can perhaps learn not to make rash or ill-considered promises and to always act according to the law.

Looking at the question about whether anything similar might happen today, we can think perhaps of the poisoning of a Russian citizen in this country, the diversion of an aeroplane to a hostile country to imprison someone on board: and looking round the world we can think of places like Yemen, Ethiopia, Syria, perhaps the Middle East generally, and maybe North Korea, or even China, and wonder at the activities of the leaders of these countries restricting the activities of individuals who disagree with the government.

Is the story so bizarre? There is clearly a division of ideas on how a country should be run. We sometimes think that our democracy is the perfect way to run a country, or if not the perfect way, at least much better than systems which do not allow criticism of the leadership. What difference does it make to our attitudes as Christians?

I think the answer lies in the command to love one another. Herod's actions could not be condoned as they did not reflect love for anyone. Poisoning someone cannot be a sign of love: hijacking a plane does not show love: Imprisoning anyone does not show love. It seems to me the world would be a much better place if there was more love shown to and by everyone. Jesus' commandment was to love one another.

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Heavenly Father, may we love all with whom we come into contact whether they be friends we agree with, strangers who we meet or people who have opinions that differ from our own.
Amen.

Bible readings: Amos 7: 7-15; Ephesians 1: 3-14; Mark 6: 14-29

Story: 'Down in the Well' (the challenge faced by the prophet Jeremiah)