

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
8th Sunday after Pentecost/Year B/Proper 10
July 15, 2018
Text: Mark 6:14-29

This past Monday a new addition came into the Fenner clan. According to my niece, Alanna, I became ‘Godmother’, to the cutest little female *puppy* named ‘Bella.’ Now this is a BIG deal because as much as we pleaded through the years, my siblings and I were allowed goldfish but never a four legged animal.

Over the last three or four years the kids continually asked their mom if they could get a dog with promises that *they* would take care of it. Grandma wasn’t having it but they kept pushing it and this year they finally won their case (or ran Patrice down, I say) and she finally said ‘yes’. So they all did their homework and after much searching through and with Stray Rescue, two weeks ago Bella and her foster mom made a home visit. Needless to say, it was love at first sight. Anticipating her arrival to her forever family, Alanna and Aaron spent their own money and bought her a collar, a leash, and water and food bowls. Last Sunday they all went on a shopping spree to get things for the puppy-a bed, a crate, and a couple of other things. Even Aunt Renee went to Pet Smart right after church and bought the dog a couple of toys. She needs toys, right? On Monday, we went to pick Bella up but not before Patrice shelled out some serious cash. And by Tuesday, it was obvious that a bottle of spray to get out stains and odors would be needed, as well as a brush, oh, and some treats too! On Wednesday, she got a new collar because the other one was too big and Lord only knows what other expenses *they* will have in the very near future. The week has been fun but a costly endeavor in taking care of an 11-week-old black and white fur ball with legs! Still, there is a lesson in all this, one of loving and caring for one of God’s wonderful creatures.

It costs to live. I am not speaking about just the cost of food, shelter, clothing, and other bills we incur but the very value of life. Life on this planet. Life in God’s creatures-great and small. Your life. My life. Human life. Our lives are not cheap though others may not value who another person is or may become. We read and hear about this daily especially of late, don’t we? Of people taking advantage of other human beings, making unfounded charges, driving recklessly out of road rage, the number of revenge and jealousy and power and hate crimes on the rise. Which brings us to today’s gospel.

This is a different sort of Gospel lesson that we have before us. While Mark mentions at the very beginning that “Jesus’ name had become known” there is no other sign of joy or hope anywhere else. Instead we hear a story of anger and revenge situated in first century Palestine. And what a story it is!

The plot revolves around two men, John the Baptist and Herod Antipas-not to be confused with his father, Herod the Great and two women-Herodias and her daughter, also called Herodias-sometimes called Salome.

John, we know, was a prophet, described by Jesus as the greatest man ever born of a woman. John came to prepare the way of the Messiah with a call to repentance. He was never one to mince words which is exactly what got him into trouble.

King Herod Antipas was a conflicted and devious man, always seeking his own power and glory and yet one who was never quick to rock the boat with the powers that be or with his wife.

John let Herod know that it was against the law to marry his brother’s wife, Herodias, especially since Herod’s brother still lived and breathed! Herodias was not happy with John’s meddling and wished John dead. But Herod liked to hear John preach and thought John was an interesting character so instead Herod had him arrested and imprisoned. But Herodias never forgot how John spoke out against the marriage and was determined to destroy John even if it took a lifetime.

We heard in the story that Herod threw himself a birthday bash and Herodias, Herod’s step-daughter/niece provided the entertainment. Sated from an evening of food, wine, and Herodias’ dance, Herod makes the girl an offer: he would give her anything she desired-even half of his kingdom. But instead of stopping a moment to think on her own the girl goes to her mother to ask what she should ask for. And her mother, still seething with hate for John answered, “The head of John the Baptizer.” Young Herodias could have asked for jewelry, money, half of Herod’s kingdom, her own mall for herself and her girlfriends, prime season tickets to all the St. Louis sports teams! But John’s head? Herod was shocked and grieved. He did not want to grant the girl’s request but he had publicly offered her whatever she wanted in front of officials and guests. His reputation was more important than the life of John. A human life was bartered to save royal face. Herod could have made a different choice but power, prestige, and pride came first.

Not much has changed over the centuries. John would not be the last person imprisoned unjustly or squashed because of someone else's need for power and control. We still live in a world where those entrusted with power or think they have power will do whatever is necessary to save face or to be seen in a 'better' light rather than to take into consideration another person's being, another people's humanity, and another culture's expression of identity. We cheapen life and lives when we forget that we are each made in the very image of God. That there is a common humanity that exists among us.

Herod made a terrible choice and I hope that we see a warning here. We are always subject to making choices that undermine our faith and leads us further from away from God's kingdom and the people we are meant to be. A little complacency here...a little stuffiness there, and suddenly we wake up in a place that is far removed from the values that we know as Christians and where we ought to be as faith-filled, Spirit-filled, committed followers of Jesus.

Herod chose loyalty to his kingdom (kingdom with a little 'k') and the power it afforded him. Jesus calls us to belong to *Him*-working as best we can to value life, *all lives*, and to manifest justice for all, living as best we can lives of compassion and concern and so uphold the dignity of all persons, respecting everything that our Creator has made, and speaking the truth no matter the cost.

There is a song that says "He looked beyond my faults and saw my needs." And sisters and brothers, we are to be about striving to do the very same.

General Convention wrapped up this past Friday. And what a time it was as the Episcopal Church gave witness outside the Hutto Detention Center*, and discussed more than a few important things like the #Me Too moment, Title IV, Gun Control, racial justice, same sex marriage, inclusion on every front, and welcomed back to the Episcopal Church-The Episcopal Church of Cuba.

On Thursday evening was held the last liturgy of convention and one of the newest bishops, the Rt. Rev. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, of the Diocese of Indianapolis sent people forth with the following words:

So, it's almost time to go, and with the words of the great commission we are being sent forth. And lest we forget, let us remember always that we are being sent forth by Jesus. And maybe it's just too obvious 'cause we say Jesus a lot, right? But in our excitement to get back to home and business as usual kind of, let us remember that we are being sent forth by the Jesus who lived life on the margins. We are being

sent forth by the Jesus who chose to cast his lot with the least, the lost, and the lonely. We are being sent forth by Jesus who found himself entangled with the criminal justice system of his day. We are being sent forth by Jesus who loved his friends enough to accept their betrayal and desertion. We are being sent forth by Jesus who hung to die in the heat of the day feeling the abandonment of God and people alike. And we are being sent forth by Jesus who was crucified, died, and rose victorious over death as he promised and returned to his friends who at first could not and would not believe it. But once they did, they began to set the world on fire, set the world on fire.

And so I send us out too, after having heard God's Word and sharing at God's Table, to set the world on fire and to give it life, value life, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

*(used to detain non-US citizens awaiting the outcome of their immigration status)