

Worship for Sunday 11th July 2021 Ordinary 15 **also Action for Children Sunday**

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Call to Worship Psalm 85 v 8 - 13

I am listening to what the LORD God is saying;
he promises peace to us, his own people,
if we do not go back to our foolish ways.
Surely he is ready to save those who honour him,
and his saving presence will remain in our land.
Love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will embrace.
Human loyalty will reach up from the earth,
and God's righteousness will look down from heaven.
Righteousness will go before the LORD and prepare the path for him.

Hymn: StF 21 Born in song! God's people have always been singing

- 1 Born in song! God's people have always been singing.
Born in song! Hearts and voices raised.
So today we worship together; God alone is worthy to be praised.
- 2 Praise to God! For he is the one who has made us.
Praise to God! We his image bear.
Heaven and earth are full of his glory;
let creation praise him everywhere.
- 3 Christ is King! He left all the glory of heaven.
Christ is King! Born to share in our pain;
crucified, for sinners atoning, risen, exalted, soon to come again.
- 4 Sing the song! God's Spirit is poured out among us.
Sing the song! He has made us anew.
Every member part of the Body;
given his power, his will to seek and do.
- 5 Tell the world! All power to Jesus is given.
Tell the world! He is with us always.
Spread the word, that all may receive him;
every tongue confess and sing his praise.
- 6 Then the end! Christ Jesus shall reign in his glory.
Then the end of all earthly days.
Yet above the song will continue;
all his people still shall sing his praise.

Brian Hoare (born 1935)

Prayer of Adoration

With reverence, O God, we come in humility to worship you.
For you are glorious and exalted, holy and righteous and good,
and we are weak and sinful, unworthy to stand before you.
Yet in your grace and mercy,
you have bridged the gap between earth and heaven,
stretching your hand out to us in Jesus Christ your Son.
And so we come, humbly and reverently, but also secure in your love,
and we offer you praise and honour, in the saving name of Jesus.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

In silence we call to mind our sins. *Silence*

For our pride and self-assertion, merciful God, forgive us.
For our folly and complacency, merciful God, forgive us.
For our anger and aggression, merciful God, forgive us.
For our jealousy and envy, merciful God, forgive us.
For our taintedness and impurity, merciful God, forgive us.

To those who are penitent Jesus says: Your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Reading Ephesians 1 v 3 - 14

Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
For in our union with Christ he has blessed us by giving us every
spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. Even before the world was
made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with
Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him. Because
of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would
make us his children – this was his pleasure and purpose.

Let us praise God for his glorious grace, for the free gift he gave us in
his dear Son! For by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins
are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, which he gave to us in
such large measure! In all his wisdom and insight God did what he had
purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already
decided to complete by means of Christ.

This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all
creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as
head. All things are done according to God's plan and decision; and
God chose us to be his own people in union with Christ because of his

courage, to share its good news with those around us;
faith, that despite our trials, we shall not be overcome.
In your love and mercy: **hear our prayer.**

In the name of him on whom we set our hope,
Jesus Christ our Judge and Saviour. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn StF 566 Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee

- 1 Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.
- 2 Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.
- 3 Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.
- 4 Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.
- 5 Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart—it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.
- 6 Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

Frances R Havergal (1836–1879)

Blessing – traditional Celtic

May there always be work for your hands to do.
May your purse always hold a coin or two.
May the sun always shine upon your window pane.
May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain.
May the hand of a friend always be near to you and
May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you. Amen

Hymn StF 742 We trust the mighty love of God

- 1 We trust the mighty love of God that wraps us round,
that loves us when we're good or bad; love so profound
it still gives hope when death has struck and joy is drowned.
- 2 We trust God's love that once, in Christ was crucified.
As love's uniquely precious child was nailed and died,
God, deeply pierced by human grief, stayed at his side.
- 3 In joy or grief, and deeper far than we can tell,
love finds its way through life and death and fathoms hell,
assuring faith, through pain and loss, 'all shall be well.'
- 4 We trust the future, God to you: we pray that we
may grasp our full potential here, and faithfully
go on to find earth's love fulfilled eternally.

Alan Gaunt (born 1935)

Prayers of Intercession

God of truth and love, we long to be on your side,
and so we pray for:

wisdom, to understand your will;
courage, to stand up for truth and goodness;
faith, that despite our trials, we shall not be overcome.

In your love and mercy: **hear our prayer.**

God of truth and love, we long to be on your side in the world,
and so we pray for:

wisdom, to have a true understanding of the world;
courage, to stand up against injustice and greed;
faith, that despite our trials, we shall not be overcome.

In your love and mercy: **hear our prayer.**

God of truth and love, we long to be on your side alongside others,
and so we pray for:

wisdom, to understand and meet the real needs of others;
courage, to open ourselves to the pain of loving;
faith, that despite our trials, we shall not be overcome.

In your love and mercy: **hear our prayer.**

God of truth and love, we long to be on your side as the church,
and so we pray for:

wisdom, to have a true understanding of your gospel;

own purpose, based on what he had decided from the very beginning.
Let us, then, who were the first to hope in Christ, praise God's glory!
And you also became God's people when you heard the true message,
the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ, and
God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he
had promised. The Spirit is the guarantee that we shall receive what
God has promised his people, and this assures us that God will
give complete freedom to those who are his. Let us praise his glory!

Hymn StF 466 Have faith in God, my heart

- 1 Have faith in God, my heart, trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part each promise he has made.
- 2 Have faith in God, my mind, though oft your light burns low;
God's mercy holds a wiser plan than you can fully know.
- 3 Have faith in God, my soul, his cross for ever stands;
and neither life nor death can pluck his children from his hands.
- 4 Lord Jesus, make me whole; grant me no resting place,
until I rest, heart, mind, and soul, the captive of your grace.

Bryn Austin Rees (1911-1983)

Reading Mark 6 v 14 – 29

Now King Herod heard about all this, because Jesus' reputation had spread everywhere. Some people were saying, "John the Baptist has come back to life! That is why he has this power to perform miracles." Others, however, said, "He is Elijah." Others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." When Herod heard it, he said, "He is John the Baptist! I had his head cut off, but he has come back to life!" Herod himself had ordered John's arrest, and he had him tied up and put in prison. Herod did this because of Herodias, whom he had married, even though she was the wife of his brother Philip. John the Baptist kept telling Herod, "It isn't right for you to marry your brother's wife!" So Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she could not because of Herod. Herod was afraid of John because he knew that John was a good and holy man, and so he kept him safe. He liked to listen to him, even though he became greatly disturbed every time he heard him. Finally, Herodias got her chance. It was on Herod's birthday, when he gave a feast for all the top government officials, the military chiefs, and the leading citizens of Galilee. The daughter of Herodias came in and danced, and pleased

Herod and his guests. So the king said to the girl, "What would you like to have? I will give you anything you want." With many vows he said to her, "I swear that I will give you anything you ask for, even as much as half my kingdom!" So the girl went out and asked her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. The girl hurried back at once to the king and demanded, "I want you to give me here and now the head of John the Baptist on a plate!" This made the king very sad, but he could not refuse her because of the vows he had made in front of all his guests. So he sent off a guard at once with orders to bring John's head. The guard left, went to the prison, and cut John's head off; then he brought it on a plate and gave it to the girl, who gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and got his body, and buried it.

Address

Daughters have Dads just where they want them. When our daughter Anna looked at me with those pleading eyes, how could I not give in and grant her every wish? So I understand, although in no way do I condone, poor Herod! Those scheming women in his life took advantage of his drunkenness and Herodias got her way! Herod, like Pilate some time later, is portrayed as a weak man, who knows what is right, even appreciates the words of the holy man – John or Jesus – and yet does the wrong thing, condemning them to death. Life, like this story, is all about making choices, and who or what influences those decisions.

It is difficult to be sure why Mark puts this story at this point, within the story of the disciples going out on their mission. (I note it didn't appear in earlier Lectionaries!) There seem to be two main aims: firstly, to create a parallel with Jesus' death and resurrection. John the Baptist, of course, did not return to life, although his ministry is fulfilled by Jesus.

Secondly, and this is the point I want to pursue, the story is about Herod who hears the word of God, and even enjoys listening to it, but still ends up making the wrong choice. There was a craze a while ago among a number of Christians, especially young people, to wear wristbands with the letters WWJD – meaning What Would Jesus Do? For all of us who struggle to make the right choices in life, asking that question can help us in our decision-making. But we also have to acknowledge other factors that influence our selection. For instance, family and personal history can exercise a strong influence; whether it is pressure put on directly, like a daughter coming up to you with those puppy-begging eyes, or the subconscious fear of upsetting your parents or partner and need to seek

their approval. We are often predisposed towards a family preference in our conclusions. Herod is also caught up in the web of peer pressure. Having made a promise to his daughter that she can have anything she asks for, up to half of his kingdom, he cannot then refuse her request because he would lose face among his guests. It is so easy to make a slip and then, even when we know we have said or done something wrong, we refuse to take it back because it might make us look bad. We often make choices based on other people's opinions of us, even if we know our original decision was mistaken. You can see young people doing it when they follow the crowd and end up in trouble when, in other circumstances, they wouldn't be so foolish. But older people do it too, we also do not want to seem weak or out of step with the crowd, so we end up in the wrong even when we know exactly what is right. Time and again the Bible teaches that to make a mistake is forgivable, God understands and in love forgives. But it also teaches that the worse wrong we can do is when we consciously do the opposite to what we know is right. Herod, at times listening to John the Baptist knows what is right in the sight of God. But reluctantly, like a moth drawn to a light, for political, family and face-saving reasons, he goes against his better judgement and grants his wife and daughter's wish.

It is not just humans who have to make good decisions or choices. God's choices sometimes seem quite contrary to those we would make, but are always for our benefit. In Ephesians chapter 1 we read, "*God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him, because of his love*". Although human beings are sinners God chooses in our favour, and offers forgiveness in place of punishment. And "*All things are done according to God's plan and decision*". The world is not proceeding at random, it is governed by God's choices; and even when we go against God's ways he has the power to bring things back to his plan and has all eternity to make it happen. And within all this he has provided a guide and strength for when we make our choices: the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. "*The Spirit is the guarantee that we shall receive what God has promised his people and this assures us that God will give complete freedom to those who are his*".

Thank God we have been given the freedom to choose; thank God we can seek guidance as we make those choices; thank God that by grace even when we make the wrong choices God sets us back on the right path and forgives us. The warning of the reading is to know the will of God but also the consequences of not heeding it.