

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

August 4, 2024 (Proper 10, Year B)  
Given 3 weeks after assigned day  
Mark 6:14-29

What an intriguing and disgusting story we have here. Sometimes real LIFE is more disturbing than fiction. This Herod family is worse than anything you will ever see on TV or in the movies. But this wasn't entertainment, and John the Baptist wasn't amused.

He was outraged at what he saw. This HERODIAS, that King Herod married, she USED to be his brother PHILIP'S wife. But when Herod, who himself was ALREADY married, went to Rome to VISIT his brother, he SEDUCED Herodias, and persuaded her to LEAVE her husband and marry HIM.

Now you might ask, "Why did John the Baptist make such a big DEAL about that?" Well, there's MORE to the story. You see, Herod's WIFE, she was an Arabian princess, and she ESCAPED when her father found out what was going on and attacked Herod's territory. And Herod was so HEARTBROKEN that he immediately married his MISTRESS, Herodias.

And oh, it gets uglier. We also need to note WHO HERODIAS WAS. Did you notice her name, Herodias, is spelled "Herod-ias"? She was the daughter of a man named Aristobulus, who was ANOTHER BROTHER OF—you guessed it—Herod. So, to REVIEW, when Herod married Herodias, he married the wife of his brother, Philip, and therefore his sister-in-law, and the daughter of another brother, Aristobulus, and therefore his niece.

I told you this was disgusting. It's adultery, and, worse yet, incest. Herod not only broke Jewish law, he violated the laws of decency and morality. It's no WONDER John the Baptist was outraged. It was shameful behavior, for ANYONE, and for a JEWISH KING, the ruler of Galilee, it was absolutely scandalous. It was embarrassing and INSULTING to the PEOPLE. And we haven't even gotten to what was happening upstairs while John was in prison – the part of the story where Herod lusts after his 12 year old step-daughter and drunkenly swears an oath before God.

But who was going to challenge the king? He had the right to decide whether any person in his territory would live or die. John the Baptist KNEW that challenging Herod would be risky, and in the end, he WAS beheaded for it, but John challenged Herod ANYWAY.

Sometimes we just need to stand up and say "NO!" You see, one of the KEY parts of the Christian life is saying "yes" and saying "no." As Christians, we say "yes" to GOD and God's WAYS of justice and peace and love. And at the very same time, we say "no" to the OPPOSITE, the ways of the WORLD, to the things that OPPOSE God's ways.

Saying "no" to the ways of the world is MORE than feeling sorry for someone, or disagreeing with what's happening, or even getting angry about an injustice; it's DOING something about it; it's standing up to the world and saying, "No, this is WRONG. This MATTERS."

The fight come in all shapes and sizes. The ELCA fights BIG ones on our behalf. Through the World Hunger Appeal and ELCA Disaster Response, we're one of many churches and agencies worldwide responding to natural disasters and drought and famine and poverty and malaria and so MANY things.

There are a lot of voices that say, "Hey, we should be spending our churches money in THIS country. Let THEM take care of THEMSELVES. Survival of the fittest, right?" But the CHURCH says, "No! God loves ALL God's children, and WE are not going to abandon them either. We don't care WHERE they live; we're not going to let them starve. That's NOT GOD'S way, so it's not OUR way either."

The church says "no" to the ways of the world, and we do it here at the local level too, even here in Aitkin. There are folks in this church who run the food shelf. And there are others that are

feeding people 3 times a week in our community meals. They're HELPING people – people the world would RATHER FORGET about. I've actually heard people say, and BELIEVE when they say it, that if a person is poor, they probably DESERVE it, and they DON'T deserve any help. But in Aitkin, we're standing up and saying, "NO! That's wrong! If WE don't help them, WHO will?"

I've been there. When I was growing up, there were times when we were DIRT poor, and we NEEDED a food shelf. We needed help, and thank God it was THERE for us.

This fight has many faces. There's this growing idea out there that Sunday school and Affirmation and Youth Ministry don't matter anymore. It's just one option for something to do on Sunday and Wednesday evening. But at First, we're saying, "NO! If WE don't teach them the faith, WHO will? They NEED to learn about JESUS just as much, and MORE, as they need school and values and manners. That's why we do Coffeehouse and Wednesday Night Faith and Affirmation on Wednesdays, and that's why we do Vacation Bible School and Sunday School and the Promise Milestones. It's important."

Now what I'm talking about here isn't a REQUIREMENT to BE a Christian; it's just something we DO as Christians, a RESPONSE to GOD'S love. It's something that just comes naturally to us, like protecting your little brother.

I remember one day when I was in high school, I got to ride on a different bus for sports, and it was my cousin's bus, and I sat with him. Now my cousin was in elementary school and he was just a little kid, and there was this jerk sitting behind him that kept on coming over the back of his seat and slapping him on the head. Well, I stood up and turned around and shouted at the kid, "Hey, this is my cousin. If you've got a problem with him, you've got a problem with me." He never touched him again. Now at that moment, I was my cousin's hero, but that wasn't the reason I did it; I protected him because he NEEDED it; he needed HELP, and I cared about him. That's it. That's all there was too it.

And that's how it is in the church too. We help people because they NEED our help, and we CARE. We know that God LOVES them, and that's ENOUGH. We say "no" to the world, JUST because it's the RIGHT thing to do.

We say "no" to judging people by color or class, by how they dress or they look, or JUDGING people at ALL.

We say "no" to the constant lies of politicians and celebrities and the media.

We say "no" to this culture of people cheating on their spouses and/or seducing OTHER people's spouses into cheating.

We say "no" to destroying people's lives just because it serves us.

We say "no" to tearing people down with words, just because the internet mob goes along with it. We've seen this a couple times already in this Olympics Games, and it's GOT to STOP. And it's CHRISTIANS that need to stand up and PUT a stop to it.

The world still doesn't LIKE being told "no." It would rather be left to go on SINNING in peace. But this is GOD'S world, and GOD'S church, and sometimes we need to stand up and FIGHT for God's TRUTH and God's JUSTICE.

Most of us aren't going to be in any physical DANGER for standing up for what we believe, like John the Baptist was, or the early Christians were, or Christians ARE in some places in the world TODAY. So what EXCUSE to do we HAVE? Why aren't we DOING something? There are people out there who NEED us, who need our HELP, so what are we WAITING for? Saying "yes" to God ALSO means saying "no" to words and actions that DESTROY his children. Amen.