

## "Murder She Wrote"

Text: 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19  
Ephesians 1:3-14 (Series B. 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 24  
Mark 6:14-29

Prayer:

In the 1980's Susan and I used to watch our favorite TV show called: "*Murder She Wrote*" Jessica Fletcher (Angela Lansbury). Our favorite part was guessing who committed the crime.

This portion of Scripture we have just heard a moment ago moves like a drama in **a *three acts***. It is a morality play with all the necessary components for *conspiracy, suspense, deception, and murder*. It is a tragedy as dark and devious as any play ever written. This morning, I want to re-tell the story, and let the story speak for itself, okey.

- *Opening Act (14-16)*

In the opening scene, rumors were spreading about Jesus, and they had come to the attention of King Herod. The miracles that Jesus performed caused much speculation about who he really was. Some people were saying that Jesus was Elijah, others said he was one of the prophets.

When Herod heard all the stories about Jesus, his answer was, "*John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.*" As we shall see, this was the voice of a guilty conscience speaking, and Herod had much to feel guilty about.

- *Act Two (17-20)*

This section of scripture begins with a flashback that tells the full story of the death of John the Baptist. King Herod has some bones to pick with John the Baptist, and it all started because of Herod's love life. Herod was full of himself and believed that he was above the law and above common morality, he had a morality of an ally car.

He led a life of pleasure and high-living. If he wanted it, he got it. Who was there to question his behavior? But what he wanted was his brother's wife, and John the Baptist was there to question it. And not only question it but condemned it.

Herod and Herodias reacted furiously when John the Baptist questioned their union. Herod was power hungry and greedy, but so was Herodias. Herodias was a beautiful woman who knew how to use her beauty to climb as high as she could get.

Her first husband was powerful, but when his half-brother, Herod, showed some interest in her, she concluded, the grass is greener on the side, and conveniently fell out of love and fell in love with a new man.

Their behaviour became the subject of gossip in town soon the news hit Jerusalem Gazette, tabloid, and social media, because John the Baptist knew all about their behavior. John was not in any way “*politically correct*” he condemned their behaviour, he called a spade a spade and not a big spoon.

He proclaimed his views loudly from the pulpit, in the back alleys, on the street corners, and market place. Word got back to Herod that this *bible thumbing, locus-eating, camel-hair-wearing prophet* was talking bad about him. Herod was an interesting fellow because he immediately brought John the Baptist in for a conversation.

No doubt, John explained the Old Testament laws to Herod very carefully and concluded, “*Therefore, you see, it is clearly unlawful to first steal, then marry, your brother’s wife.*” John never lacked for courage. Herod felt it was his obligation to have John locked up until the dust settled.

Herod was still fascinated with John the Baptist. On many occasions, Herod had John brought in, to the throne room so they could have a chat. Though Herod didn’t like John, he liked to listen to him.

On the other hand, Herod’s new wife Herodias, a “gold-digger wife” had no use for John the Baptist whatsoever. She hated, when people know and say the truth about her. She felt a queen should be above gossip of the streets.

They had no right to talk about her like that. And she harbored an intense hatred for John the Baptist. I imagine some late night conversations between Herod and Herodias going like this: “Honey, you are the king and that John should not be allowed to talk about you the way he does. Why don’t you silence him?”

“Well, dear, John is irritating, but there is something about him that I like.” “Not me! I don’t like him at all. And neither should you. You are the king. Silence the disrespectful rascal.” “I don’t think he is disrespectful. Just committed. He really believes what he believes. I admire a man who knows what he believes and sticks to it.”

“But he is saying terrible things about you, and me. I hate him. I want him dead. Wouldn’t you have him put to death just for little old me?” “Hey, let us leave it at that, and let me the country.”

Herodias was even angrier when she realized that her new husband refused to have John killed even when she had begged him to do it. Now she was just as mad at Herod as at John. But this was a woman who knew how to get her way, so she began to look for an opportunity to get what she wanted any way she could.

- *Scene three (21-29)*

Her opportunity came on King Herod’s birthday. There was, that stag parties which respectable women were not invited. Herod invited the leading men of Galilee, including the highest-ranking government, Ceo’s of companies, and military officials of the kingdom, for a guys’ night out.

There were lots of eating and too much drinking. I picture these events as much like the nightclubs we have today where women dance around poles, all without benefit of clothing.

But on this particular night, Herodias and her daughter Salome were hiding in the shadows. When it came time for the belly dancing, Herodias sent in her beautiful, young daughter Salome instead of the paid stripper. I suspect that Herodias knew enough about lap dancing to teach her daughter how to do it well.

All the men, including Herod, were thoroughly drunk. And Salome’s dance was a great success. The men were accustomed to belly dancing being just a bit on the degraded side. But here was not only an attractive young girl, but she was the famous stepdaughter of the king.

How often does one get to see the king's stepdaughter doing lap dances? The king was too drunk to be embarrassed or ashamed about the highly suggestive dance. So, in a moment of extraordinary passion, Herod got up and made a promise: *"Ask for anything you want, up to half my kingdom, and I will give it to you."*

The crowd of men roared to their pleasure. And Salome was pleased and surprised. But before she could answer, she wanted to consult with her mother. She ran to her mother, saying, "Mom, mom he promised me anything! This is better than the lotto 649 or Lotta max.

We can have anything we ever wanted! Let's ask for a fabulous house or expensive diamonds and jewelry. Oh, mother! This is our chance. We can have anything we want. For what shall I ask him?"

But Herodias was consumed with her hatred even more than her greed. Her plot was working perfectly. With piercing, angry eyes, she said, *"Go back in there and ask for the head of John the Baptist!"*

Young Salome protested, "But Mom! We can have anything we want. Let's get something wonderful." Herodias barked her reply, *"You go back in there and do exactly as I say. Ask for the head of John the Baptist. Now go!"* And reluctantly, Salome did as she was told.

When Herod heard Salome's surprising request, he shot a glance around the room, knowing for the first time that his wife was behind this whole plot. He had been had, and he hated being manipulated.

His first impulse was to rescind the promise, but what would all the men around him say. They would see him as a wimp, spineless king, or maybe afraid of John the Baptist. He had made a foolish promise in an all-too-public manner, and now he couldn't go back on it.

He was in a sour mood now, but he commanded that the deed be done. Soldiers hustled off to the dungeon where John was being kept. Perhaps John thought he was being escorted for another late night discussion with the king. Rather they ushered him to the chopping block, and off with his head.

Soon the guards returned with John's head perched on a silver platter. The drunken crowd once again roared with cheers. They all proclaimed that Herod was a man's man. They were too drunk to notice the sadness on Herod's face. The party was over for him, and he quickly left the party.

Poor Salome was sad and depressed as well. Tears came to her eyes when she recalled the repulsive expressions on the drunken faces of all those rudely men. As she recalled their whoops and hollers every time she took more clothing off.

But then she thought about her opportunity lost. She dreamed of all the expensive gifts she could have asked for. She was filled with anger at her mother who had forced her into it in the first place and then had ruined it all by asking for the wrong thing.

As she drifted off to sleep, she kept muttering to herself, "I could have had half the kingdom." But Herodias went to sleep that night with a grin on her face. She was so pleased with herself; she had gotten her way at last. Oh, sure she had paid a high price.

Half the men in Jerusalem had just seen her daughter naked and lusted after her. Now every time she would appear in public, men would be looking up and down at her. Young Salome would no longer enjoy the innocence that should belong to her teen years.

But it was worth every moment to Herodias her mother. She didn't care what it had done to her daughter. She didn't care that her husband was filled with rage that she had tricked him.

She didn't care what all those men thought of her or her daughter. She only cared that John the Baptist would never call her a "gold-digger adulteress" again. And her face broke into a broad smile as she drifted off to sleep.

***Final Chapter of the story:*** We leave this story with the apparent victory of *Herodias* and the tragic death of *John the Baptist*. But as their stories unfold, we find that Herod and Herodias paid the price for their selfish actions. Josephus a Jewish historian tells us that both Herod and Herodias eventually committed suicide.

A wise man once said to me: “*Sin will take you further than you are willing to go, and it will cost you more than you are willing to pay*”. This story reminds me, may be, all of us, that kings and mighty men / women may plot their plans, but God judges all.

During his life Herod proclaimed himself as the greatest man who ever lived, but in the end his guilt and personal failures led him to ruin. The problem with a sinful lifestyle is that it leads to ruin whether you are a king, queen, or just common person like you and me, “*there is no right way of doing what is wrong*”. Only the way of God leads to true happiness, contentment, and eternal life.

So, there we have it - a classic morality play “*Murder She Wrote*”. The message lies in the story itself. Each and every one of us must look at the story and find ourselves.

God's purpose for all is to be united, as *God's own people*, living holy and blameless lives through the redemption of Christ. By *the riches of grace*, we are forgiven our trespasses and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

As we set our life's purpose to live in obedience, giving praise to God, and with our hope in Christ, we will reap the reward of our *inheritance*, life eternal in God's Kingdom.

Let us pray to God that we will all find contentment in our relationships, and in mundane things of life. And have the courage to avoid the temptation *to hate*, *to revenge*, *to lust for power*, and *greed*. As we set our life's purpose to live in obedience, giving praise to God, and with our hope in Christ, we will reap the reward of our *inheritance toward redemption*, life eternal in God's Kingdom. That's where the real and forever music and singing is, with our Triune God leading the greatest Dance of Joy and true happiness, and to life everlasting in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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