

## **Introduction**

John the Baptist speaks truth to power, and Herod has him killed. In Herod's fear that Jesus is John returned from the dead, we may hear hope for the oppressed: all the prophets killed through the ages are alive in Jesus. We are called to witness to justice in company with them, and to proclaim God's saving love.

## **Prayer of the Day**

God of the covenant, in our baptism you call us to proclaim the coming of your kingdom. Give us the courage you gave the apostles, that we may faithfully witness to your love and peace in every circumstance of life, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

## **First Reading: 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19**

*The ark of the covenant, long a symbol of God's presence with Israel, is brought into Jerusalem by David. The entrance of the ark into this new capital city is marked by great rejoicing, and David himself is the chief dancer.*

<sup>1</sup>David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. <sup>2</sup>David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. <sup>3</sup>They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart <sup>4</sup>with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. <sup>5</sup>David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

<sup>12b</sup>So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; <sup>13</sup>and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. <sup>14</sup>David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. <sup>15</sup>So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

<sup>16</sup>As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

<sup>17</sup>They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the LORD.

<sup>18</sup>When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, <sup>19</sup>and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

## Psalm 24

<sup>1</sup>The earth is the LORD's and all | that is in it,  
the world and those who | dwell therein.

<sup>2</sup>**For the LORD has founded it up- | on the seas  
and established it up- | on the rivers.**

<sup>3</sup>Who may ascend the mountain | of the LORD,  
and who may stand in God's | holy place?

<sup>4</sup>**Those of innocent hands and puri- | ty of heart,  
who do not swear on God's being, nor do they pledge by | what is false.**

<sup>5</sup>They shall receive blessing | from the LORD  
and righteousness from the God of | their salvation.

<sup>6</sup>**Such is the generation of those who seek | you, O LORD,  
of those who seek your face, O | God of Jacob.**

<sup>7</sup>Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, O ever- | lasting doors,  
that the King of glory | may come in.

<sup>8</sup>**Who is this | King of glory?**

**The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, might- | y in battle!**

<sup>9</sup>Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, O ever- | lasting doors,  
that the King of glory | may come in.

<sup>10</sup>**Who is this | King of glory?**

**Truly, the LORD of hosts is the | King of glory.**

## **Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14**

*In Jesus, all of God's plans and purposes have been made known as heaven and earth are united in Christ. Through Jesus, we have been chosen as God's children and have been promised eternal salvation.*

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup>just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. <sup>5</sup>He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup>that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup>In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, <sup>12</sup>so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; <sup>14</sup>this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

## **Gospel Reading: Mark 6:14-29**

*As Jesus and his disciples begin to attract attention, Mark recalls the story of John the Baptist's martyrdom. Like John, Jesus and his disciples will also suffer at the hands of those opposed to the gospel of salvation.*

<sup>14</sup>King Herod heard of [the disciples' preaching,] for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." <sup>15</sup>But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." <sup>16</sup>But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

<sup>17</sup>For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. <sup>18</sup>For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." <sup>19</sup>And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, <sup>20</sup>for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. <sup>21</sup>But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. <sup>22</sup>When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." <sup>23</sup>And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." <sup>24</sup>She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." <sup>25</sup>Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." <sup>26</sup>The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. <sup>27</sup>Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, <sup>28</sup>brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. <sup>29</sup>When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

## Prayers of Intercession

Let us come before the triune God in prayer, saying “God, in your mercy,” and responding, “hear our prayer.”

*A brief silence.*

Holy parent, you welcome your people into one family and gather all things to yourself. Bestow your grace upon your beloved church, lavish your wisdom upon us, and redeem us from our faults, that by our witness all might praise your glory. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Awesome Creator, you steadfastly tend to the smallest of seeds and the mightiest of sycamore trees. Spring up green growth from the earth, nourish the growth of fruit, grain, and other crops, and bless the work of farmers and laborers. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of the oppressed, turn the ears of those who are in power to the voices of prophets in our own day. Protect those who speak difficult truths when it is risky to do so. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of strength, you are near to those who endure difficulty. Comfort all who are survivors of violence, guard the refugee and the immigrant, and protect all those who are victims of prejudice and discrimination. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of love, we pray for this holy house and all those who worship here. We pray especially for those whose efforts behind the scenes often go unnoticed; for the custodian(s) and maintenance workers, for our office staff (*other positions may be named*), and for all of our volunteers. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We thank you, God, for the saints, martyrs, and prophets who have died in the faith (*especially Benedict of Nursia*). We remember those in this community who have recently died. United with them as God’s children, assure us that we are yours forever. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your abiding grace.

**Amen.**

## ***A reflection for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost...***

### Speaking Truth to Power

Few of us want to hear a hard truth, and perhaps fewer of us want to be the ones called to deliver one. Today's texts remind us that bearing God's word is risky business. King Jereboam exiles the prophet Amos for calling him to account. Herod delivers John the baptizer's head on a platter to his wife, Herodias, to fulfill a promise he never should have made. Speaking truth to power can cost us our lives.

Yet this is exactly what God calls us to do. God's prophets are ordinary people called to deliver an extraordinary message. Listen to the praise Paul heaps on the Ephesians, naming them as God's blessed, God's chosen, and God's adopted children (Eph. 1:3-5). It is the kind of pep talk coaches give their players just before sending them back into the game against a seemingly unbeatable team. Like Amos, who freely confesses his humble background and unlikely credentials, we are sent from worship each week to proclaim God's in-breaking reign to all the powers that profess to rule this world.

Still, beneath the apparent victory of power over truth, there is a hidden story bursting through the seams of this tale. Yes, John the Baptist dies, but the integrity of his witness outshines all of Herod's corrupt court intrigues. Herod himself was drawn to John's preaching, and in the end it is Herod's character that seems most tragic.

Like Herod, we are each challenged to really listen to the challenging voice of God in our day and age, and to turn away from the lures and temptations that attempt to seduce us away from fidelity to God. Through us, God speaks words of peace, love, and faithfulness that challenge the world's violence, hatred, and treachery.

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