

“Repent”

Mark 1:1-8, 6:14-29, 16:8

Pastor James York

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Prayer for Understanding Ever-present God, open our hearts to your healing word, our minds to your informing word and our souls to your renewing word. Amen.

The gospel of Mark begins: **Mark 1:1-8 NLT** “This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written: “Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you and he will prepare your way. He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming! Clear the road for him!’” This messenger was John the Baptist. John was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, John baptized them in the Jordan River. John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food John ate locusts and wild honey. John announced: “Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I am not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!”

Mark continues describing John baptizing Jesus. Mark’s gospel is short. Mark is known for sparse details and yet Mark gives several details about John. Be curious. One of Mark’s longer accounts is Herod beheading John. Why did Mark spend some much time sharing this account? Why did Mark create a complex psychological portrait of Herod? Herod was a troubled person. Herod’s family was dysfunctional. The government officials, army officers and the leading citizens of Galilee surrounding Herod were complicit with their silence. Look for sins that plague our society today. Look for sins that tempt you. Look for the good news. John’s preaching convicted people of sin and urged them to repent, to turn to God for forgiveness.

A reading from the gospel of Mark: **Mark 6:14-29 NLT** “Herod Antipas, the king, soon heard about Jesus, because everyone was talking about Jesus. Some were saying, “This must be John the Baptist raised from the dead. That is why he can do such miracles.” Others said, “He’s the prophet Elijah.” Still others said, “He’s a prophet like the other great prophets of the past.” When Herod heard about Jesus, he said, “John, the man I beheaded, has come back from the dead.” For Herod had sent soldiers to arrest and imprison John as a favor to Herodias. She had been his brother Philip’s wife, but Herod had married her. John had been telling Herod, “It is against God’s law for you to marry your brother’s wife.” So Herodias bore a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But without Herod’s approval she was powerless, for Herod respected John; and knowing that John was a good and holy man, Herod protected John. Herod was greatly disturbed whenever he talked with John, but even so, Herod liked to listen to John. Herodias’s chance finally came on Herod’s birthday. Herod gave a party for his high government officials, army officers, and the leading citizens of Galilee. Then his daughter, also named Herodias, came in and performed a dance that greatly pleased Herod and his guests. “Ask me for anything you like,” the king said to the girl, “and I will give it to you.” Herod even vowed, “I will give you whatever you ask, up to half my kingdom!” She went out and asked her mother, “What should I ask for?” Her mother told her, “Ask for the head of John the Baptist!” So the girl hurried back to the king and told him, “I want the head of John the Baptist, right now, on a tray!” Then the king deeply regretted what he had said; but because of the vows he had made in front of his guests, Herod could not refuse her. So Herod immediately sent an executioner to the prison to cut off John’s head and bring it to him. The soldier beheaded John in the prison, brought John’s head on a tray, and gave it to the girl, who took it to her mother. When John’s disciples heard what had happened, they came to get John’s body and buried it in a tomb.”

Reflecting on this scripture theologian John Shea writes: “Herod’s undoing is a real warning. This pathetic king is so weak he kills a holy and righteous man because he fears he will lose the respect of other political and religious leaders. I would like to treat him as a past historical figure, a species of regal scum. But I

think he is the inner temptation of everyone who loves their life and wants to save it. Since I am one of those people, I want to notice what went wrong. Herod is typical. We read every day of people who harm the lives of others to protect their lifestyles. They have never repented from ego to soul, from love of self, to love of others. Herod is a dark sibling to all who want to save their life in the world. Paradoxically, his darkness shows the path of light. We will know how to correctly save our life in this world if we repent valuing the eternal world. We must move beyond listening and not acting.”

Reflecting on this scripture, Homiletics writes: “Herod’s dance with death. Herod is so tragically flawed and messed up that he cannot escape from his own misdeeds. Herod is his own worst enemy. Notice how utterly incapable he is of refusing to do that which he knows is wrong. His marriage is wrong, his order to execute John goes against everything he feels about this special case. Herod is fascinated by John. Herod at once “fears” John and knows that John is a “righteous and holy man.” Herod protects John — probably from his wife. Herod loves to listen to John, even though he is “perplexed” by what John says. When Herod hears that the prize his daughter desires is John’s head, he is “grieved.” Herod is grieved and powerless. That is the dance of death. This is the dance we step when we grieve over our decisions or actions but seem powerless to change them. We are doing a dance, and we cannot get the bandleader to change the tune. Herod had heard about Jesus but never met him. And by the time Herod does, he is still dancing. Again, he cannot bring himself to call a halt to Jesus’ execution. The call in this text is a call to repentance. We must understand that our sinful behavior is not biologically determined, culturally required or morally necessary. We can drop out of the death dance and begin the dance of life.”

We are transformed from the dance of death to the dance of life by God’s grace and by our choices, by repentance, by turning from sin to love. Justification is humanities sinfulness washed away and our goodness enhanced by the grace of God. Sanctification is a person becoming completely good by repentance.

Mark illustrates a myriad of sins we are to repent from. Repent from interpersonal hostility, hostility between persons and hostility in government and hostility between governments. Atrocities, war, abuse, and hunger continue today proclaiming a universal need for all to repent. Theologian John Shea perceives a gospel theme in today’s scripture. Weak people kill. Strong people forgive. Herod is weak. John and Jesus are strong. John and Jesus preach repentance and forgiveness. John and Jesus do not succumb to the pressure to blame, shame, persecute, and make excuses, even as they are being murdered. John and Jesus proclaim forgiveness, resurrection, and eternal life.

The dance of death is keeping secrets, coverups, spin, being boastful, and lustful. The dance of death happens when one misspeaks, says something unloving or puts their foot in their mouth; and then instead of admitting their mistake, they keep digging, make excuses, are arrogant and tell greater lies. The dance of death is saving face and striving to impress others. Herod could have said, “I made a mistake. I should not have offered to fulfill any request. I will not behead John.” Herod, who could stand up to nobody, kills John who stood up to everybody. Herod was obsessed with prestige and constrained by what others thought of him. Herod lacked the courage to repent. Herod harmed others to save face. The people at the party could have protested. Instead, they join in the hostility by their silence and later by trying to explain it away, covering it up, and spin. Repent from hurtful speech, covering up mistakes, and lying. The dance of life, when mistakes are made, own them, confess them, tell the truth, admit you misspoke, swallow your pride, and try to heal the situation. The truth sets one free.

The dance of death is greed, fear, manipulation, jealousy, controlling others and taking advantage of another. Herodias was greedy, so she did evil to sustain her luxurious lifestyle. She feared losing her status. She used her daughter and manipulated her husband, so she could get her way. Siblings repent from playing their parents against each other. Spouses repent from using what you know about your spouse to get your way. Repent from dysfunctional behavior, control, and manipulation. The dance of life is listening and communicating your needs, wants and feelings with I statements.

The dance of death is staying at a job where you are told to do unethical tasks, harm others, and compromise love for profit. The soldier could have refused to behead John. Tragically, he probably would have been killed for his refusal. The dance of death is hiding behind the idea that companies and corporations are too big to influence and change. Companies and corporations are groups of people. People can change. Tragically, some companies make decisions to sell products that they know harm people, destroy the environment, and even kill people, as long as the profit generated is projected to be bigger than their cost. Repent from being

silent when bullying, abuse, unfair practices, and harmful actions happen at your workplace. These situations are tough predicaments, especially for someone with no financial savings as speaking up might cost one their job forcing them into poverty. The dance of life is fostering a work environment of respect, collegiality and providing products and services that enhance everyone's life and are good for the environment.

The dance of death is greed and control. Herod enjoyed all the benefits of being king. Herod rationalized he needed to kill John to be seen as invincible, so he could extract outrageous taxes for his own enjoyment. Herod abused his power, utilized his privilege, and set himself above the law so he could take whatever he wanted. I wonder what John would say to me. Would John disturb me? I wonder what John would say about my travel. Would John convict me that I am unloving, that I should be giving more money to help people? If I gave more money to the right organizations, could I save more lives? What would John say to us? Repent from indirectly controlling people, oppressing people, and killing people by our unloving spending and consumption. The dance of life is loving in all situations, living as an equal to all people, being a steward of money for everyone's well-being, and living the most excellent way of love.

The dance of death is ignoring the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our mind, feelings, and through other people. Herod was greatly disturbed because he knew he was continuously committing many sins. Herod deeply regretted what he said but could not bring himself to repent, to turn, to love, so he created more death, beheading John. That decision haunted Herod causing him to conclude that John has come back to life to convict him, to continue his sermon; repent, believe the good news, be forgiven, and experience abundant life. Repent from ignoring the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The dance of life is accepting the comfort, counsel, and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

What other sins do you perceive in this account? What sins do you perceive in our world today? What sins do you perceive in yourself? How are you actively trying to repent, to turn to love, to sanctify yourself, that is become the good loving person God created you to be and is redeeming you to be?

Herod killed John and played a role in Jesus' crucifixion. The gospel of Luke proclaims Jesus' words from the cross: **Luke 23:34 NLT "Jesus said, "God, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** The "them" includes Herod, includes everyone. God forgives everyone.

After documenting the resurrection Mark ends his gospel stating: **Mark 16:8 NLT "Afterward Jesus himself sent them out from east to west with the sacred and unfailing message of salvation that gives eternal life. Amen."** The final word for everyone, even the ruthless, wicked, murderous, dictator Herod, is an "unfailing message of salvation that gives eternal life". Strive to repent and know you are forgiven. The message we are to proclaim to all is an "unfailing message of salvation that gives eternal life. Amen."