

[Music] Nobody's feeling faint yet, or are you?

A little warm in here.

As we gather on this Sunday after Pentecost, we continue with Mark's revelation of who Jesus is.

Today's Gospel reading, Jesus isn't even in it.

It's not even mentioned.

And yet, he shows up in some very profound ways because we get a glimpse of who Jesus is not.

And that leads us to who Jesus is.

As we worship together today, I would certainly suggest Summer Protocol, which means if you've got water nearby, sit as you need.

Sometimes we stand during the service.

You may not want to do that today.

You'd prefer to sit.

That's great.

Thank you for having fans set up.

I think that'll help too.

And windows are open, so hopefully we'll be okay.

There's something I've forgotten, but I think we're just going to sing the first hymn anyway, and it'll come to me. 2 o'clock this morning, I'll email you and tell you what it was.

It'll be fine.

[Music] The Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark.

King Herod had heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known.

Some were saying, "John the baptizer, he's been raised from the dead, and for this

reason these powers are at work in him."

Others said, "It is Elijah."

And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

But when Herod heard it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised, for Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him and put him in prison on account of Herodias."

Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her.

For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

And Herodias had a grudge against John, and wanted to kill him.

But she would not, because Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, Herod protected John.

When Herod heard John, he was greatly perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him.

But an opportunity came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee.

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."

And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give to you even half of my kingdom."

And so she went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?"

And her mother replied, "The head of John the baptizer."

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."

The king was deeply grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her.

Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head.

He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl.

Then the girl gave it to her mother.

When the disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

The gospel of our Lord.

Grace and peace from the one whose will it is to one day restore all things.

So we read this gospel reading at the first service at Port Colburn this morning, and the assisting minister, some of you know this guy, mumbled sort of under his breath, but sort of not, "Fun story."

Good times.

If Mark the Gospel writer had access to an iPhone and a Twitter account, oh, it's not even called that anymore, I don't remember what it's called.

Here's what he would write, "This is how empires work."

This is how empires work.

[Pause] Maybe I need to remember that with every single news story I read where it seems that the poor get thrown under the bus yet again in the name of somebody wanting to make more money than they already have.

Maybe I need to remember this is how empires work when people go off to war, and it's assumed that these human beings may be acceptable losses.

Maybe I need to remember this as I think about something a relative recently reflected on in his own involvement in the war in Vietnam.

His job as part of an ordnance crew was to chase Russian subs.

The person asking that question dealt with the kind of ordnance that contaminated everything, including the flight crew, and has spent the last 45 plus years with all manner of medical issues that isolate him.

But that was an acceptable loss because that's how the empire works.

Back to Herod and his little empire.

You're thinking, "Oh, big fish, small pond, guess what?"

It was indeed a small pond.

He was a lackey for the Roman Empire.

That's all.

But he and this miniature royal family decided that they had immunity.

They had immunity against the criticism of the likes of John the Baptist, who was, for all of his work, kind of a prophet guy.

And what happens when prophet tells the inconvenient truth?

Nothing about, "Oh, thanks for pointing that out.

Man, you really, uh, boy, you got me there."

Nope.

Have him killed.

There's an expression.

"Kill the messenger."

Gee, I wonder where that came from.

Hmm.

This is not an outlier of a story.

You remember Samuel, the priest whose job it was to find Israel's first king, King Saul?

Some 1,100 years before John the Baptist, he warned people.

He said, "This will not end well.

Kings, they don't operate in the way that the Torah or community should operate.

There's no shalom to be had here."

Uh, King David, call your office.

King David, abuse of power, hello.

And then there's this guy that Sylvia read to us about today who oversaw a scheme, a scheme in which people who were creditors, they could draw out all of your assets until you had none, seize your land, and then turn you into a slave working on the land that used to be yours.

This charming little scheme, uh, called by the commentators, "Rent Capitalism," is one that Amos speaks about.

That plumb line, measuring things, how does it look?

It ain't square, it ain't plumb, it ain't just.

And King Amos says, "Well, Amos, don't give up your day job.

Go back to where you came from."

Because, guess what?

It's how empires work.

In Amos's day, in John's day.

Mark has a certain deviousness about him, the way he tells the story, beginning with the way he ends this grisly chapter of John's life.

John's disciples, they go, they fetch the body in parts.

They gather it, they take it to a tomb, and they bury it.

I think Mark wanted us to think ahead a bit to what happens to Jesus.

And I think that even here, Mark wants us to ask, who really gets the last word here?

Spoiler alert, it ain't the empire.

The next story that Mark tells that we'll hear next week, and I won't tell you the

whole thing, but just enough, Mark tells the next story on purpose where he tells it.

Jesus withdraws to a lonely place.

He's grieving.

And people who are poor, who are sick, who are tormented, who are harried and harassed, follow him and congeal into a crowd.

And guess how this Jesus, the one who really does have the last word, respond.

He feeds, he heals, he teaches, he restores.

I think we could tweet on that one too.

This is how the realm of God works.

Amen.

[Music] [Music] [Music]