

Mark 6:14-29^{vii viii}

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." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of 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, 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 him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 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. 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 you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She 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, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

^{vii} **About Mark 6:14-29**

In this section of the gospel, Mark uses one of his familiar “sandwich” constructions to highlight the meaning of the mission of the disciples. In between their sending (vv. 7-13) and their return (v. 30), instead of narrating the details of their mission Mark recounts the death of John the Baptist. His message is clear: there is no privileged form of discipleship. Sharing in Jesus’ mission will always cost.

In Mark’s gospel, the fate of John the Baptist and Jesus are closely linked. When John is arrested (Greek, handed over), Jesus then began his ministry (1:14). Now in the ministry section, the fate of John serves as a warning about the hardships that disciples will also face after Jesus’ death. John’s death also foreshadows the difficulties that Jesus must face in carrying out his mission. He will soon have to reveal to the disciples that his death must be an essential part of his messianic role (8:31, 9:31, 10:45).

Later in the gospel, John will once again be mentioned when Jesus arrives at Jerusalem and engages in his final controversies with the Jewish authorities before his death (11:27-33). The authorities’ inability to answer about the meaning of John and his authority leaves them also unable to decide about Jesus.

^{viii} **Reflection and Response**

We might expect a drum roll, or at least a lightning flash, when God chooses human beings to participate in God’s work. Yet in today’s readings we see a more human, humble face of the choice described so beautifully to the Ephesians. God “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.”

Amos is an example of the Lord’s stamp of destiny on responsive people, whom God may call from any modest quarter, fill with the Holy Spirit, and commission to speak God’s word. Amos had no credentials as a prophet, and sounds rather bewildered that he was called away from his sheep and sycamores. Nevertheless, he had no doubt that he had been divinely called to speak God’s word.

Like the people in Nazareth who turned a deaf ear to Jesus, so Amos’s listeners rejected his unpopular message. In less than fifty years, however, his prediction came true.

When Jesus sent out twelve disciples, they were ill-equipped by our standards—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, no extra clothes. Only sandals on their feet—to carry them to the receptive and away from the unreceptive; and a staff—a support for walking and perhaps a symbol of the shepherd’s profession. Neither were they prepared for their mission by understanding fully what it was all about. Jesus sent them out with a message that had made him offensive even to his own family. Yet

something about him must have impelled them to go forth with the same message.

How then do we follow their model? Perhaps they show us that we needn't have our own houses perfectly in order before we minister to others. Nor do we need to spruce up our credentials: apparently none of the disciples took theology courses in the seminary. Jesus calls them in their ordinary clothes, pursuing their usual routines. To do his work, it seems more important to have a companion than a new wardrobe.

Their willingness enables them to drive out demons and cure the sick. They discover powers they didn't know they had. And people knew there had been followers of Jesus among them. These disciples had been chosen for an astonishing destiny.