

The practice of power

Mark 6.14-29

John the Baptist is arrested for telling King Herod some home truths about his behaviour. He is not afraid to 'speak truth to power'. John pays the price for this with his life because of a rash promise the king had made to his stepdaughter.

Now read **Mark 6.14-29** see p.2 for text.

A note on the passage

The passage is set in a society that had a strong culture of honour and shame. Saving face was a powerful factor in those times. To have gone back on his promise publicly made to his stepdaughter, Herod would have lost the respect of his court and subjects. He knew they were watching to see how he would act. He is clearly torn as he makes his decision, because he believes John to be a good and sincere man. Nevertheless, in the end he valued his reputation above a man's life.



Ask yourself: How do we make sure that God has a say in our key decisions?

Research

Look through newspapers and magazines, or browse the internet, for images of people who have power and influence in our world, and over our lives – e.g. world leaders, activists, celebrities and advertisers/influencers. Make a collage of the images, or write the people's names, placing them under three headings according to how their influence is perceived: positive, negative or both. Children could think closer to home – e.g. parents, friends, teachers – and draw pictures of them (however, be aware that this may open up sensitive topics such as bullying). What influence do we have over others and how might that be perceived?

Prayer



Heavenly Father, thank you for the opportunities you give us to be an influence for good in our world. Help us to encourage one another to do that little bit of good where we are. Inspire us to dream big dreams, and help us to make the world a better place. **Amen.**

A DAYTIME IMITYAD A REFLECTION NOITCEJER

As you walk, drive, take a trip by bus or train, or just while watching TV, identify sources of power and influence – for example, you might pass the council offices, see an advertising poster, recognise a church building. Pray for all who exercise power over others, that they may use it wisely and for the good of all.

WATCH



Watch a video clip of Martin Luther King Jr. delivering his 'I have a dream' speech.

youtu.be/3vDWWy4CMhE

Next Sunday, 18 July, is Black Leaders Awareness Day which encourages the next generation of leaders from this community. Consider the paradox that Martin Luther King was denied power in his lifetime and made himself vulnerable to the point of death; and yet he continues to have great influence today. We often feel powerless in the face of difficult situations, but we do not know how important our words and actions might later prove to be. One thing is certain: if we say and do nothing, we will achieve nothing! Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, 'Do your little bit of good where you are, it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world'.

Dream

How did watching the video make you feel (see WATCH above)? Martin Luther King was inspired to act by the hopes and dreams he cherished. Can you dare to dream? On your own, or with others, think about your hopes and dreams for the future. Are they personal or shared? Local or worldwide in scope? Can you think of practical ways in which you might begin to make these dreams come true?

Choose a version of the passage to read. The first is the ROOTS version for children, the second is the NRSV text which may be suitable for older children, young people and adults.

King Herod had arrested John the Baptist and put him in prison because John was saying that he should not have married Herodias. Herodias had been the wife of Herod's brother, Philip, and John said that their marriage was not lawful. So Herodias was very angry with John, and wanted to kill him. Herod was angry too, but he respected John as a good and holy man and so he kept him safe in prison.

On his birthday, Herod held a large banquet for lots of guests. His stepdaughter came and did a special dance at the party and Herod was so impressed that he said to her, 'Ask me for anything that you want and I will give it to you, up to half my kingdom.'

The girl went to her mother and said, 'What should I ask for?' Her mother said, 'Ask for the head of John the Baptist.'

So she went back to Herod and asked for John's head on a plate. Herod did not want to kill John, but he had made a promise in front of his guests, so he sent



a soldier to cut off John's head. When John's followers heard about what had happened, they came and took John's body and laid it in a tomb.

When King Herod heard that Jesus was teaching people about God and healing them, he thought that Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life.

Mark 6.14-29

Did you know?

- John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin.
- This passage comes just as Jesus is becoming known in the area.

Mark 6.14-29 (NRSV)

King Herod heard of the healings and other miracle, 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.