

Proper 10b 2021  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
July 11, 2021

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19   Psalm 24   Ephesians 1:3-14   Mark 6:14-29

Theologian David Lose finds the hope from this gruesome gospel story: When the Temple has just been destroyed, you do poorly on an exam, your marriage is ending, or you've lost your job, or you fear your child will never speak to you again, or you're pretty sure your friend has betrayed you, or you think you may just have screwed up the one relationship that meant something to you...then the possibility of another ending -- a *good* ending -- is, indeed, not just good news, but the best news you can imagine.... As honest as Mark wants to be about the story of the world, he wants even more to testify to the story of God's great love *for* the world. (David Lose, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), 7/14/12)

Mark's account of Herod's celebration shows us the potential cost of discipleship, the unimaginable cost that took John the Baptist's life. Mark also gives us a foreshadowing of Jesus' own death that is yet to come. Just as John's truth telling to people in power leads to his being taken prisoner and suffering a terrible death, so it will be with Jesus. What a terrible tale.

However, when John's disciples heard about John's gruesome death, they changed the end of the story by giving him a proper burial. "They came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb."

"Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.... Pilate granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock." (Mark 43, 46)

At the moment, Jesus' story, too, is a terrible tale, except for the honor given to John and Jesus in their deaths. In the context of the ancient society that is very attuned to honor and shame, the burials are displays of courage, measures of restoration in a situation gone terribly awry.

It is the foreshadowing of Jesus' death which gives us the best news ever, even coming from a world as distorted as the one taking place at the scene of Herod's celebratory ball. The horrible stuff represents the world and the things that some will suffer while following Jesus. The vast majority of us are not called literally to die for Christ. But death happens. We live in a violent world. And --John the Baptizer was given honor with a proper burial. There is good in the world. You and I might be the ones to do such good, to give honor, to someone else. Jesus was given a proper burial, and after three days,

Jesus the Christ gave us life! Better than what we can ever imagine, there is new life in Christ. What does that new life look like ... and how do we get there? We know we cannot buy our way to heaven (right -- we know that?). We cannot "good works" ourselves into heaven, nor stomp along anyone who might be in our way. Some of the good news in this John the Baptizer story is that this whole thing is part of a bigger story. This is one of those instances in which Mark dropped a story into another one. (Intercalation -- the Markan sandwich!)

The story surrounding this one is began a week ago, when Jesus calls the twelve disciples together and sends them out, in pairs, to heal. We go out (go forth into the world!) each week. At

some point, the disciples will come back and tell Jesus their travel/healing stories; these will be our gospel readings in the coming weeks. The coming home is the other side of the longer story. This week we are in that sending out place, and we are being told the truth about the world. We will heal; we will do miracles in God's name. Then again, we will encounter places in which we are unwelcome. We will not always be "successful." Do not worry about those who do not want to be part of the Good News. Jesus says physically shake off your feet to those who do not receive us well. Come back and tell your stories!

How appropriate at this time and place to be in a place of hearing "out in the world" testimonies, at this time when we are coming home to our worship space. How has it been? How are **you**? How **are** you?

Tell me, where did you find God in our quarantine times? Tell me, tell one another; inspire each other to find those times and places – maybe times when we thought that God was absent and that God really was with you, with us. I find God in the strangest of places...

On the day that the hospitals were closing to any/all visitors, I was allowed to sit with a family during a diagnostic procedure and an unnerving diagnosis. We prayed together. I was allowed to be in a nursing home and share stories with a family member in her parent's final days on earth. What a sending forth all of us had! Sent out with a diagnosis, the patient was on the way to be healed. Sent out with precious stories, memories, and even song, a mother was lifted into the arms of our most loving God. I find God in such places; my role sometimes is to help you find God there, too.

Most of the times I found God during the pandemic were not quite like those times; apparently God likes a good game of "hide and seek." Seek I did, and I know that you did, too. In ancient times, the time of King David, the ark of the covenant was a physical representation of God. Writings tells us that it held the Ten Commandments and bit of manna, both items of grace from God. God provides order, sustenance. The Ark is carried ahead of the Israelites in their forty-year journey through the wilderness as a constant reminder that it is God who provides for us, cares for us, is with us.

David brings the ark out of the land of the Philistines, bringing God to the front of the Israelite's lives again. There was, however, a lot of disobedience in this carrying of the ark. The Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be carried by the Levites, the priestly line of Israelites, as an expression of carrying the burden of the Lord as carried on the priest's hearts. We have a modern equivalent. The mark of a priest's call is a stole; it represents the yoke of a beast of burden, the weight of carrying the Lord in my heart. Many of us carry burdens that we are not supposed to be carrying – as in, we need to give those burdens to the only arms that can carry them, the arms of God. Some burdens we carry; others we can let others with authority or a particular spiritual wisdom carry with us or for us. What is it that you are carrying that you will set down ... give to God ... so that you can experience God's love now, today? Think about these questions:

Where has God been?

Where is God today?

What burdens are you being called to let go of?

Come back and tell the stories. Come see me, invite me to coffee, join with a few others, and tell the stories. Then we come to church so that we, too, will sing and dance and pray in order to glorify God, to praise God for what God has done for us and given us – which is everything. We give thanksgiving, Eucharist, and send one another into the world.

When we go out to join in God's will for us, good things will happen. Bad things will happen. And God is here, wanting to dwell with us. God says to David, give me a place. Not a temporary tent, a tabernacle, but build me a place... and really, **the** place for God is within each of us. We gather, partake in Christ's holy body, as the body of Christ, the church. We worship, praise God – we may well be challenged by God! – and we go out to live in the abundance that we have been given through Christ Jesus. There will be a better ending to our lives and to the world in the reconciliation of God to all of God's people through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I am so very grateful to be part of the journey of this body of Christ. Now, go and tell ... and come back and tell ... about finding the presence of God ... in every place. Amen.