

8th Sunday of Pentecost
"The Power of Love vs The Love of Power"

When the power of love overcomes the love for power, only then will the world know peace. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of ALL our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our guide, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen. Good morning! It is so wonderful to be back here at the beloved Christ Church, a community that is filled with love, joy, and warm hospitality. Today, I have the honor of speaking to you about a story from the Gospel of Mark that might just be the worst birthday party ever. Our Gospel reading today is filled with drama, conflict, and a violent resolution. It's a tale that could be straight out of a soap opera or an episode of "Law and Order: Organized Crime." Yet, within this tumultuous story, we find profound lessons about the power of love and the dangers of the love of power. As we delve into this passage, I invite you to reflect on this question: What does it mean to truly love one another and to be one together? The Gospel moves away from Jesus and his disciples to give us a flashback about John the Baptist and the evil plot that led to his demise. It's filled with abusive power, drama, and conspiracy. Some might find it difficult to say at the ending of the reading, "The Gospel of the Lord," "Praise to you, Lord Christ."

You might wonder, “Where is the good news in this reading?”

You see, Herod was a man desperate for power. He inherited his love for power from his father, Herod the Great, the same man who ordered the deaths of all the infants in Bethlehem, just to find and kill Jesus. The apple clearly didn't fall far from the tree. Herod, like his father, surrounded himself with people who would use his favor to acquire their own power. He didn't understand the true importance of power—the power of love. Instead, he focused on control and domination. So, what does it mean to hear the words, “We are one together”? It means that we must love each other and not try to control each other. Think of your body; every part is essential. No one part is more or less important than another. All parts of the body belong, and together, the body is complete. If anyone here is dealing with parts of their body not working as they should, know that you are valued and whole in the eyes of God. Yet, have you ever put together a jigsaw puzzle only to discover a piece missing? It's unsatisfying to have a lovely picture marred by a missing piece. Similarly, every piece of the body of Christ is valuable. Without love, we are incomplete. Herod's family was incomplete because they focused more on power than on love for each other.

When the power of love overcomes the love for power, only then will the world know peace. Herod was frightened by Jesus, wondering who this man was. He feared Jesus might challenge his authority. Herod's love for power would eventually be overcome by Jesus' power of love. Jesus taught with authority and spoke the truth without fear. He broke the rules created by those afraid of losing their power and showed that love was more important than power. Through the power of love, we become one—a family that prays together and stays together. Let me share a personal story that illustrates the power of love. When I was young, my grandmother lived in a neighborhood where people hardly knew each other. One day, she started a simple tradition: a monthly potluck dinner. It wasn't long before neighbors began to bond over shared meals and laughter. What began as a small gesture of love transformed the entire community. People started looking out for one another, and the sense of unity and care grew stronger each day. The power of love brought them together and created a community that supported each other through thick and thin. Herod's family was focused on power, not on love. Herodias, Herod's wife, wanted John the Baptist dead because he spoke against their unlawful marriage.

During Herod's birthday party, Herodias's daughter danced, and Herod, in a drunken stupor, promised her anything she wanted. Coached by her mother, she asked for John the Baptist's head. Herod, bound by his pride and the promise made in front of his guests, complied. It's a tragic story of a dysfunctional family ruled by the love of power.

We can learn from Herod's mistakes. A wise person learns from others' mistakes. Here are some ways we can apply this lesson in our lives this week:

1. **Practice Gratitude:** Take time each day to appreciate the people in your life and express your love for them.
2. **Show Compassion:** Reach out to someone in need and offer your help, showing them the power of love through your actions.
3. **Seek Unity:** Work towards resolving conflicts in your life with a spirit of understanding and reconciliation.

Herod's story teaches us that power without love leads to destruction. We must strive to love one another and seek unity. Today, as we reflect on this story, let's choose the power of love over the love of power.

Let's be bold in our beliefs, trust in God's plan, and leave a legacy of faith and love. Remember, when the power of love overcomes the love of power, only then will the world know peace.

Amen.