Text: Mark 6:14-29 (Amos 7:7-15)

**Introduction**

Someone trying to kill Donald Trump yesterday might put a different shade on this, at least temporarily, but the purpose of the pulpit isn’t just to be a less telegenic pundit. It is hopefully to invite the people of God to be able to pass through things temporal, that they do not lose the things eternal. And our strange gospel text invites us to ponder the Kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of Heaven. And how the overlap of the Kingdoms works.

**Text**

Something that I think is necessary to think about Herod and The Baptist, is to understand the narrative frame. Immediately before this story Jesus is rejected and almost killed by his hometown. And his reaction to that is to send out the twelve to proclaim the kingdom – to heal, and drive out demons and call to repentance. And after this story the disciples return to Jesus and report on everything they’ve done, and Jesus begs them to come away with him to a desert place.

As John the Baptist was a forerunner of Jesus, the disciples will be proclaiming the coming kingdom after. And the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in this world probably doesn’t look like what we might expect. No disciple is above his master. And this world kills our master. This world for ludicrous trivial reasons kills the Baptist. As Matthew would have Jesus say about this story – “From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven has suffered violence, and the violent bear it away.” The Disciples when they return are riding high. The Demons obey their voice. Surely the Kingdom is one that will go from victory unto victory as the great hymn would sing. Yet while they are winning, the Baptist is being beheaded, and Jesus is pondering the coming cross. What Herod is to the Baptist, Pilate looms in the future for Jesus. And if we accept the church histories, a similar fate awaited 11 of those 12 sent out. The Kingdoms of this World are ambivalent to the Kingdom of Heaven.

And Herod in Mark’s story is their perfect symbol. The various portrayals of Herod from Broadway and Hollywood are interesting in themselves. In Jesus Christ Superstar, Herod is this effeminate flouncy comic relief. The very part of the man in soft clothes that Jesus chastises another crowd about the Baptist: “What did you go out to see, men in soft clothes?” But in the most recent season of the Chosen, Herod is a hard sharp man. Someone who knows exactly what is going on and is doing his best to stay out of its way. But sometimes even Herod can’t avoid some things. Like his wife using her daughter to prey on his pride in front of the good and great of the day and his base lust.

The Kingdoms of this World operate by different rules and have a different master. That doesn’t mean they are stupid or incurious or unknowing. It just means don’t mistake any actions of a temporal authority for the work of the Kingdom of Heaven. The way that Mark tells the story is through a flashback by Herod. Herod has become aware of Jesus. The Kingdom of this World is aware of the Kingdom of Heaven. And everyone is playing the parlor game of Jesus’ question “who do people say that I am?” And Herod has a specific answer. “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”

The Kingdoms of this world recognize a paradoxical truth about the Kingdom of Heaven. They both have power over it. “John, whom I beheaded” And they are ultimately powerless. “John, has been raised.” You kill one prophet, another is likely to come. And the prophet has a certain power over the temporal ruler. “John had been saying to Herod, ‘it is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’” And while Herodias – that brother’s wife, now Herod’s wife according the rules of his Kingdom – “had a grudge and wished him dead,” Herod himself “feared John, knowing he was a righteous and holy man.” And he kept him safe. And he heard him gladly. Even if hearing John left him perplexed at times.

The Kingdoms of this World can recognize the Authority of the Kingdom of Heaven. If they are wise they can even do right. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This strange Kingdom of Heaven that operates by its own rules might perplex them, but it goes better if they keep it safe. If they gladly hear what the Kingdom of God teaches. And the people of God are not wrong to desire such a temporal rule. A rule that keeps at bay the worst of humanity – our grudges, and sins and desires to kill. That is actually the purpose of the temporal kingdom, that first use of the law, the curb. And it is possible to ask God for such rule. We do it basically weekly here. But the scriptures are written for us, for the people of God, for the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. And the lesson is not to put your faith in princes. The Kingdoms of this world are ultimately ambivalent – maybe even opposed – to your King.

In Herod’s case Herodias understands both her Husband and how the Kingdoms of the World operate. The Kingdoms of the World are ultimately about Status, and Shame, and the appearance of power and keeping it. And Herod for his birthday holds a great state dinner. All the nobles and the military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. The entire who’s who of Galilee. Everyone who Herod is the titular head of. Also everyone who looking to climb the status ladder would gladly take Herod out the moment he showed weakness or the inability to carry out his word. And Herodias understands a baser vice. She puts Herod in a pincer between his pride of place and his lust.

The Kingdoms of this world are always ultimately made up of sinful men. And as the old saying goes, nothing straight was ever built out of such crooked timber. Herod’s lust leads to foolish promises. Every election season in a democracy leads to foolish promises…unwise language…the giving in to vice. And nothing that starts poorly builds straight. When the plumb line of the Kingdom of Heaven is placed against it. But the Kingdoms of this world do not work according to that plumb line. They work, while they work, on power laws. “The King was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word…and immediately he sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head.”

**Christology**

The proclamation is that all existence has one true King – Jesus Christ. The powers that be – the principalities of this dark age – have been in rebellion. And it is Satan that owns the Kingdoms of this world. But his time is short. The Kingdoms of this World become the Kingdom of Our Lord.

But you, Oh people of God, do not confuse the Kingdoms. You owe Caesar the honor and taxes that Caesar deserves. He is in place because God has allowed it. And he should care for your temporal good. But your eternal good is with your true King – Jesus Christ.

And where the temporal authority can a Herod, a beast, chopping off the heads of the righteous and holy and acting as the beasts that Daniel and John saw; that is the limit of His power. Your King has the power of eternal life and death. And even Herod knew it. This Jesus is John raised. He’s a little off, but not far. Because all the saints of God as safe in the resurrection. All of their lives are hidden in Christ. And the beasts will be thown into the pit. The pit that they temporally kept the saints like John in, they will experience eternally.

The Kingdom of Heaven may suffer violence today. But in Christ, in the resurrection, we are beyond the temporal powers. Even the powers of death.

**Moral**

So what does all that mean for us who are still subject to the temporal powers? Maybe all too subject.

However high that passions might run. Don’t let these minor temporal matters distract you from the eternal glory that is yours. The Kingdoms of this world will rage together. Some might cozy up to you, and others might cut off your head. But don’t lose sight of your true king. Remember your plumb line. The Holy Spirit which resides in you is building something straight and true. Do not fight the Spirit but allow yourself to be bent as the Spirit blows.

**Eschatological**

And as hard as it might be to believe. God is in charge of everything and it works for the good of his people. The Kingdoms of this world will be the Kingdom of our Lord. The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now.

Pray. Bring your petitions to your King. May we not be under beasts, but under wise rule. But even more importantly, let me not lose The eternal kingdom because of the passions of the temporal kingdoms.

And should it be my day in the pit, Lord, lift up my soul.