

Proper 10B (Pentecost 6), 2009

Text: Mark 6:14-29

Title: "Not an Easy Life"

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Today's gospel is not easy to hear. It speaks of jealousy, adultery, incest, deception, and eventually murder. It's not a happy story. It's not a good story for young children. It's not an easy story to hear, and it's not an easy story to preach.

The gospel story doesn't seem like a good fit for a day like today. Today is a day for celebration, as Brayden becomes a child of God. There are many stories that would seem better suited for a day like today- Jesus the Good Shepherd. Jesus healing and raising the dead. Jesus calming the storm and walking on water. These would all seem like a better fit.

Even the epistle lesson seems like a much better fit. In Ephesians Paul writes of "spiritual blessings" "redemption" "forgiveness" "grace" "hope in Christ" "praise" "glory" lots of good stuff. This text seems to be much better suited for a baptism, for a day of new life and celebration. It would be easy to hear a sermon on Ephesians 1 today. But we can't get to Ephesians without going through Mark first.

Life for those in the church isn't always easy. Just look at the life of John the Baptist.

John, as you will recall, was Jesus' cousin. He was the forerunner, the last and greatest prophet, the one who was to prepare the way for the Messiah. His birth was miraculous, foretold by angels and prophets. His father was a priest and his mother was a great woman of faith. He pointed to Jesus and boldly proclaimed that He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But John did not have an easy life. Zachariah and Elizabeth were very old when he was born, and John was probably an orphan at a young age. He lived in the wilderness- he wore rough clothes and ate rough food. Animal hides and bugs were his way of life. Just look at your bulletin cover.

John did not have an easy life, and he did not have an easy message for people to hear- Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand. The fire of His wrath has been kindled. The axe is already at the root of the tree. God is coming, so shape up, or else face His anger.

John's message of repentance was for all. John told the Pharisees to repent. John told the soldiers to repent. John told the tax collectors to repent. John told everyone to repent. Even Herod. Especially Herod.

Herod had a new wife. But Herod's new wife was also his niece and the wife of his half-brother Philip. Herod had traveled to Rome and stolen her away from him.

It doesn't take a theologian or an expert in Mosaic Law to know that what Herod had done was wrong. It was wicked and sinful. Herod had broken God's commandments. Herod needed to repent.

But it was not easy to stand up to Herod. There was no freedom of speech in those days. There was no freedom of the press in those days. You risked your life when you criticized the ruler.

And still, John the Baptist was a faithful, courageous preacher. His message was not easy, and yet he still spoke it. Repent! This is not lawful. This is not right. Repent! No one else had the courage to say it, except for John.

As a result, John was thrown in prison. In prison for speaking the truth. In prison for doing what God had sent him to do.

That was good enough for Herod, but not for Herodias. She still heard John's accusing words ringing in her ears. She thought that maybe if John was silenced, then she would be able to sleep at night. Repenting was hard. It was hard to admit that she was wrong and that what she had done was sinful. It was much easier to have John killed.

John did not have an easy life. John's life did not go the way that he expected. John was sent by God to preach His word. John was the cousin of the Messiah. Jesus said that John was the greatest man ever born. And yet, John finds himself in prison and finally executed for doing what God had sent Him to do.

John had his doubts. At one point, while he was in jail, John sent messengers to ask Jesus if He really was the Messiah.

John did not have an easy life. And this text is not easy to listen to.

You have not had an easy life, either. You have longed for a life of ease and comfort, but it has not come.

Instead, you have had a hard life. A difficult life. An uncomfortable and uneasy life. A life filled with pain and sorrow and disappointment. Things have not gone the way that you had hoped.

Even though you have been a Christian all your life, even though you were raised by Christian parents and been a faithful servant of the Lord, you have not had an easy life.

Much like John, your life has not been easy. You have faced hardships of many descriptions. You have faced poverty. You have faced illness and injury. You have faced death. You have faced conflicts within your family- separation and divorce.

Like John you have had your doubts. It shouldn't be this hard. You've longed for an easy life.

But the Christian life is not easy. You will struggle with the same hardships faced by all people, as well as the opposition and persecution of one who belongs to Christ.

Brayden- you will not have an easy life. As one who belongs to the Lord, your life will be difficult and full of hardship and temptation. Today you will be joined to His death and resurrection. You will be a new person. You will be a different person. Your life will not be easy.

The world will tempt you to take the easy way out. You'll hear people tell you that there's an easier way.

It's easier to tell a lie than the truth.

It's easier to keep your mouth shut than give a clear witness of Jesus Christ.

It's easier to ignore your neighbor's needs than to help and befriend him.

It's easier to sleep in rather than come to church.

It's easier to head home rather than stay and learn from God's Word.

It's easier to have sex and to live together than to wait and receive God's blessing in Holy Matrimony.

It's easier to hold on to your money and manage it yourself than to tithe and trust the Lord to care for you.

It's always easier to ignore the Lord and His word and to do your own thing.

Jesus faced all of these same temptations. He was tempted to take the easy way out. He was tempted to put Himself first. He was tempted to turn from the way of the cross and to seek His own glory.

But Jesus did not choose the easy way out. He set His face towards Jerusalem and went all the way to His death.

Jesus did this for you. He knew that you could not do it. He knew that you would fail. He knew that you would choose the easy way out.

Jesus walked the hard road to Calvary for all. For John the Baptist, even for Herod and Herodias and Salome, and for you, Brayden. Jesus shed His blood on the cross for you.

Which finally brings us to our glorious Epistle lesson. The blood of Christ is the source of all these blessings Paul writes of here in Ephesians. All of these blessings are yours because Jesus did not take the easy way out.

Brayden- every spiritual blessing in Christ is now yours through Holy Baptism. In Holy Baptism you are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God chose you before the foundation of the world. He now makes you holy and blameless before Him in Holy Baptism. He now adopts you into His family through Holy Baptism. He redeems you through Holy Baptism. He gives you the riches of His grace through Holy Baptism.

Brayden- you have now heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, you are given the gift of faith and you will now be sealed with the Holy Spirit through Holy Baptism.

And so now you praise God for all these blessings.

It's not an easy life, but you're not in it alone. The Lord has gone there first, and He goes with you now. He was with John the Baptist, even in prison, even in death. In the midst of your hardships, your struggles, your persecutions, the Lord is with you. He has made you His own in Holy Baptism, and He promises never to leave you or forsake you.

Brayden, He will be with you now and every day of your life.