

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SAT. JULY 11, 5 PM & SUN. JULY 12, 2009, 9 AM

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MESSAGE Haunted Memory? Holy Memory! Mark 6

I. Herod Antipas in our Gospel lesson, one of the sons of Herod the Great who ruled Palestine when Jesus was born and killed all the little boys of Bethlehem, is a haunted man, isn't he? Herod is haunted by a memory ... he is haunted by a guilty conscience. Herod, was a man who took delight in the extraordinary, the flamboyant. Nothing about Herod was ho hum. When Herod did something it was over the top. For example, though our lesson begins by calling Herod 'king', it's a little of the Holy Spirit's sense of humor/sarcasm, Herod was never a king. He was simply a Roman puppet. Caesar of Rome, pulled the strings through the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate. Herod aspires to think of himself as 'king' but he isn't and never will be. Matter-a-fact, goaded by the ambitious Herodias, it was Herod's insistence to be made king which officially leads to his dismissal and he is eventually, history tells us, banished to Spain where he and his wife Herodias die.

Herod, in his flamboyancy throws a lavish party, a party for guess what = his own birthday. Herod, was certainly an, 'it's all about me' kind of person. We're told Herod delights in having Herodias' daughter Salome dance for him and his guests. Now Herodias is another flamboyant character of the Bible. She was a granddaughter of Herod the Great. So marrying first Phillip and then Herod Antipas she marries her two uncles. 'O, what tangled webs we weave' as the old saying goes. In his flamboyance Herod makes a promise he could never keep. Since Herod was not a king except in his own egotistical mind, he had no kingdom to give away, not even a ½ kingdom. Then with his over inflated ego, with his 'all about me' perspective, Herod, has John the Baptist who as God's prophet warned **'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife'**, beheaded and his head delivered on a platter. Gross! Grotesque! No wonder Herod is dealing with a haunted memory, a guilty conscience. When he hears of Jesus' name he imagines Jesus to be John the Baptist raised from the dead haunting Herod's memory.

II. Boy, oh boy, oh boy! Herod is an easy figure to despise, isn't he? His sin was so extraordinary. His sin was so flamboyant. Herod was over the top in his example of that middle letter of sin 'I', it's all about me, me, me. Herod makes our sins seem like minor infractions, not even worth mentioning, doesn't he?

But, be careful! As God's prophet today, your Pastor, I warn you. God's Word is clear. All sin is worthy of God's damnation.

James 2 'Whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all'.

We may not live in palaces, we may not give lavish birthday parties, we may not have grandiose ideas of kingship, we may not even make outlandish promises we can't keep. We all know better than all that, don't we. And yet, we all do have one thing in common with Herod Antipas, the flamboyant, over the top, self serving, wanna be king, we're all haunted by a memory of our sin. Aren't we?

Human sinfulness is no respecter of palace or humble home. Human sinfulness doesn't care if you're a wanna be king or an ordinary everyday people. Human sinfulness is in the heart of a flamboyant sinner or a common sinner. Our sin can torment our soul and conscience, mind and heart, not because we remember beheading God's prophet, but sin torments because we remember that 'one' particular sin. And we all have them.

As Jesus says in His Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, simple frustration with another human being is sin against God's Law not to murder.

Matt. 5: 22 'Anyone who says 'you fool' will be in danger of the fires of hell'.

A simple glance at another woman or a man for that matter is sin against God's Law, not to commit adultery.

Matt. 5: 27 'I tell you anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart'.

While you might have come to worship with the best intentions to listen to God's Word read and preached and taught, failing to respond to God's Word in your daily life is sin against God's Law of the First Table 'put God first, don't misuse God's name, remember God's sabbath'.

Sin haunts our memories. Sin haunts our conscience. Sin haunts our souls, as much as it did good ole Herod. That one moment of weakness, why'd you do it? That one word you can't take back, why'd you say it? That one time of lost control, why'd you lose it? That one moment you lost your cool, why'd you do it, say it, lose it? Our sins don't have to be like Herod's flamboyant sins to haunt our guilty

conscience. Our daily, ordinary sins haunt our memories, guilt our conscience and will condemn our souls to hell.

III. Notice however! And this is very, very, very important! It's why I made such a point to clarify what that little word 'IT' in the first line of our Gospel lesson. 'IT' is referring = to Jesus sending out His disciples 'in Jesus' name'. Mark, you see, sets the flamboyant sins of wanna be King Herod within the context of Jesus public ministry, so important!

'Jesus went around teaching from village to village' the verses just prior to our text tells us **'Jesus sent out the twelve 2x2 and gave them authority to cast out evil spirits'**.

Herod hears 'IT', Herod hears what is happening in the name of Jesus. And with that small phrase 'King Herod heard of IT', Mark leads us into something bigger, much BIGGER than Herod's flamboyant sin of having relationship with Herodias his brother's wife or even beheading John the Baptist.

Mark, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit begins the story of Herod's extraordinary sins with an even greater extraordinary story of Jesus' name and ministry. King Herod heard of 'IT' we're told. Herod heard of Jesus sending His disciples out to proclaim God's Word and cast out demons. While Herod is haunted by his sinful memories, while Herod is haunted by his guilty conscience, Jesus is preaching and teaching and transforming people's lives by God Word. Jesus is sending out His disciples to drive out people's demons of their haunting sins by the message of God's love, God's grace, God's mercy, through God's call to repentance, to change from Herod's and our self centeredness, self serving, self esteem, self righteousness, self condemnation of our guilt. That's what the 'IT' Herod heard was = Jesus' name.

Which as:

Acts 2 says 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved',

Acts 4 says 'Salvation is found in no one else, there is not other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved',

Philippians 2 says 'The name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow'.

Hear IT!

IV. Bible history, church history, world history all tell us Herod missed this life changing, guilt freeing, repenting grace of God for Jesus name. But, we don't have to miss it! Regardless of what sin you have brought with you into church today. There is no sin, not even sins as flamboyant as Herod's, or as ordinary as yours which God does not want to forgive 'in Jesus' name'. There is no sin too small for God

not to notice. God sees them all. That memory of sin which plaques you, God knows it already. That moment of weakness, that word you can't take back, that time you lost control, that lust, that dislike, that failure to live by God's Word is nothing you need to hide from God or try to cover up or pretend it doesn't exist, confess it, admit it. Jesus has already been there for it. Jesus died on the cross for your sins, all of them. Jesus has paid the price for those sins, every single one of them. Herod feared that John the Baptist, whom he killed, had risen from the dead haunting his guilty conscience. We sinners, however, we rejoice that Jesus who our sins killed/crucified has risen from the dead to forgive our haunted guilty conscience.

IT's in Jesus' name we are forgiven!

IT's in Jesus' name we receive God's grace and mercy!

IT's in Jesus' name we remember, not hauntingly remember the guilt of our sins.

But, IT's in Jesus' name we 'take and eat, take and drink in remembrance of Jesus' for the forgiveness of all our sins'. So we can throw a party, a 'rebirth' party, not all about me, me, me but in celebrating God's grace and mercy upon us sinners. We are throwing a party which we call worship and praise. This is IT, the memory never to be forgotten but the memory to be affirmed by faith. Through God's Word which has become known to us, our memory is not haunted like Herod's, but our memory praises all that Jesus Christ has done for us 'in His name'. Through the Holy Spirit, we have a POWERFUL MEMORY! Through Jesus we have a holy, forgiven memory, not a haunted, guilty memory. Now you have heard 'IT'. Let's remember and party hardy in Jesus' name. Amen