



# Sunday Reflection

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 14 July 2024

## Pentecost 8

**The Rector will preach at St John's  
& St Margaret's:-**

As we continue through these weeks following Trinity Sunday, we gather once again to worship God, who is our Creator, Redeemer and guiding Spirit.

*"The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her."*

*Mark 6:26*

### **An illustration to set the scene**

Sally's birthday party was going well.

She was delighted that so many of her new colleagues had accepted her invitation.

Now the wine was flowing freely, the conversation likewise and laughter filled the air.

Someone said, **"We could do a team-building exercise next month. A charity bungee jump! You up for it, Sal?"**

Without thinking, she replied, **"Of course!"**

The next morning, Sally's hangover was the least of her worries.

**"What have I done?"** she moaned.

With her fear of heights, it was impossible, but... how could she get out of it now?

What would all those colleagues she was trying to impress think of her if she pulled out?

Perhaps something similar happened to Herod Antipas in today's Gospel.

### **Today's Gospel teaching**

Herod (*not to be confused with his father, Herod the Great, of the Christmas stories*) had been hosting a birthday banquet when, presumably, the wine fuelled his rash promise to give his dancing stepdaughter anything she wanted.

No sober host would have offered half his kingdom!

Nor would he have given in to her mother's proxy request for the head of the imprisoned John the Baptist.

We're told that Herod had been protecting John from the worst of his wife's anger.

He had feared John, in the sense of respecting him, acknowledging that he was a **"righteous and holy man"**.

This was even though John had publicly criticised Herod for marrying his brother's wife while her husband was still alive, perhaps not even divorced.

But, like Sally's rash promise, Herod's solemn oath had to be kept **"out of regard"** for his guests.

Like her, he feared showing weakness in front of people he wanted to impress.

Guilt set in, however, when, at the beginning of today's Gospel, he heard what Jesus was doing in his teaching and healing ministry, and how people thought he might even be the prophet Elijah, risen from the dead.

These stories triggered a vivid memory of that birthday banquet and the death sentence he'd decreed for someone else that people had thought might be Elijah.

Now Herod began to fear that Jesus, too, was a revenant, a resurrected John the Baptist, the man he had reluctantly allowed to be killed, just to impress his guests.

What Herod couldn't know at that point, is that Jesus was not John, but would indeed rise from the dead.

Jesus was greater than Elijah or any of the prophets.

He was greater than John the Baptist – who had even prophesied that one greater than he would come, and whom he had in turn baptised in the River Jordan and witnessed the Holy Spirit descending upon him.

Just like Herod the Great, Herod Antipas couldn't thwart God's plan.

In Jesus, the baby who survived the Massacre of the Innocents had grown up as both man and God incarnate, God's Word made flesh, the Saviour of the world.

Perhaps Herod Antipas learned from his mistake, for when Jesus was eventually brought before him, after his arrest, Herod didn't seek to impress Pontius Pilate or the religious authorities by condemning him, but handed him back.

Weak, yes, but not complicit.

Jesus would still be crucified, but on the cross he died for the sins of the world, for those who are weak and foolish, as well as those who are wise and powerful, and he rose again, to offer new life to all who believe.

### **How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?**

Is there a message for us today?

Perhaps it's that we shouldn't allow ourselves to be led astray by seeking to impress others.

When we know what is right, we should stand up for that.

When we see wrongdoing, we should call it out.

Importantly, we shouldn't hide our faith simply because we fear unpopularity.

None of this means we should be aggressive, though, because the Gospel of salvation is one of peace and justice for all God's children.

If we're honest, we all like to impress others in some way.

We want to be liked, to be respected, to be loved.

Fortunately, we don't need to impress God.

God knows exactly who we are, and we are loved as we are, with all our faults and failings.

If we confess them, God forgives us our trespasses.

And that's impressive.

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