



Sunday
14th July, 2024

Pentecost 8B

Indeed, very good questions

Breaking Open the Word

**Pentecost 8
Liturgical Year B**



Prepared by
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Paynesville, Victoria Australia
Anglican Diocese of Gippsland



Wear one tunic, sandals and carry a staff

READINGS

2 Samuel 6.1-5, 12b-19
Psalm 24
Ephesians 1.3-14
Mark 6.14-29

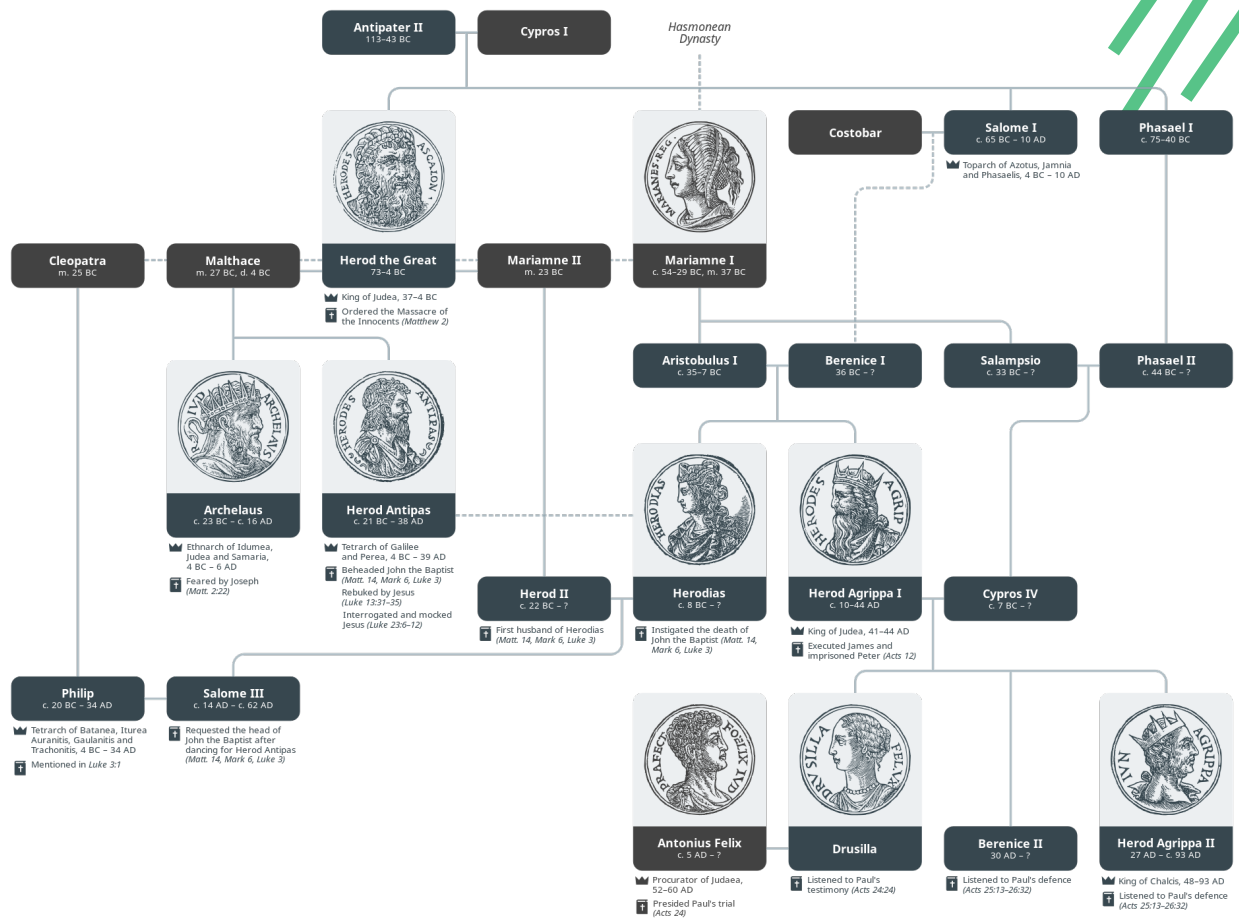


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**KEEP THE FIRE
BURNING!
BLAK, LOUD
AND PROUD**
7-14 JULY 2024

Summary



“

Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.

”

Mark 6.22

Pentecost 8B continues to explore Mark 6, reflecting on sharing the good news and questioning its impact on those who miss it.

Jesus sends multiples to continue his ministry, causing a commotion.

The reading delves into John the Baptist's role as the twelve disciples who prepared the way for Jesus.

The sermon emphasises understanding Jesus' ministry and the call to prepare the way for the Lord.

INTRODUCTION

The sermon "Indeed, very good questions," examines Mark Chapter 6, contrasting biblical events with his personal experience.

While presiding over Evensong at St Paul's Cathedral in Naarm, Dennis shares his unease about not sharing the news of Jesus Christ, particularly with tourists of various nationalities.

Dennis delves into the biblical context, recounting how Jesus was rejected by his townsfolk, considered insane by his family, and entangled in a synagogue scandal.

After these challenging events, Jesus dispatched his disciples in pairs to extend his ministry of restoration, healing, and spreading the good news.

Dennis emphasises the significance of understanding the context of biblical texts. He further explores the concept of fear and guilt within Herod Antipas, the Israeli tetrarch, upon hearing rumours of the resurrection of John the Baptist, whom he had executed.

Herod's fear represents more prominent themes of divine retribution and the weight of guilt.

The sermon underscores John the Baptist's role as the herald for the Messiah, contrasting his execution and brutal treatment with the importance of his mission. Dennis steps beyond traditional readings, suggesting secular accounts such as Oscar Wilde's play *Salome* to understand the narrative's implications fully.

In conclusion, Dennis emphasises Jesus' role within the context of his ministry and John the Baptist's impactful mission.

Despite facing difficult situations and areas of discomfort, Dennis iterates that the Word of God continues to testify to His existence and everlasting presence. The sermon concludes with a hopeful reminder - in our journey of faith, "from darkness into divine light," God remains constant and eternally dedicated to our well-being.



Keywords

context	fear
history	retribution



Contemplation

good news?	divine
uncomfortable words	light



Integration

peer pressure	accountability
standing firm	know God



God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may be your eyes, ears, hands and voice.



Indeed, very good questions.

On regular occasions, I was asked to preside at Evensong at St Paul's Cathedral, Naarm. This I enjoyed, but around the first time I was on duty, the reading for the Old Testament was the begetting of the descendants of Adam. The entire reading was about the family tree leading to Noah.

What bothered me was that there was no opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ. During the week, there was no sermon or commentary, and 'Le culte du jour' was the day's service.

I often wondered about the Chinese and Japanese tourists who left the Cathedral that night, knowing who fathered who and who was born by either wife or handmaid. This makes me wonder about today when we encounter a rather exciting and vital interlude in Mark's account of Jesus' ministry.

Having been rejected by his town, thought to be mad by his family, and scandalised by the synagogue, Jesus has just sent out the 12 in pairs to continue the ministry of healing, restoration and proclamation about the kingdom. They were sent out to continue the Messianic mission of bringing good news to the poor, allowing the lame to walk, the mute to talk, the deaf to hear, the blind to see, and justice to be demanded for those oppressed.

This is the same passage of scripture that Jesus read in the synagogue, and now the apostles, the ones who were sent, were bringing the good news of the kingdom of God to the community of Gentiles and tribes of Israel north of Jerusalem.

This created a small commotion that soon came to the attention of Herod Antipas, an Israeli tetrarch. Tetrarchs were effective "king lite," or Clayton's king, each responsible for keeping peace in one-quarter of Israel.

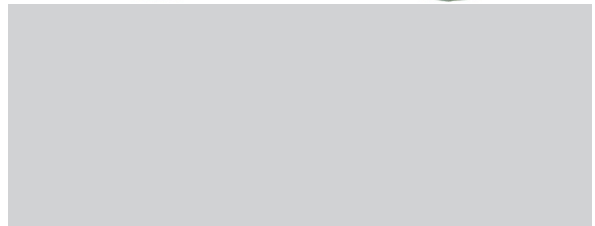
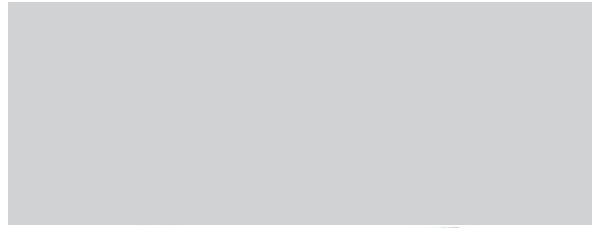
As the twelve continued their mission with authority from Jesus, Herod began to question, 'Who is this man, Jesus?' Hearing that some think he is John the Baptist resurrected strikes fear in the heart of Antipas. John the Baptist was a just and holy man. In his unfortunate hosting of a birthday bash, Antipas set in motion the execution of an innocent man due to the peer pressure of the court, a pressure that he unwittingly created.

A few important points emerge from this rather gruesome interlude. The faith teachers understood that Elijah was to come again before the Messiah would redeem Israel. Elijah was taken into heaven on the chariots of fire, so, in fact, he did not die. At the transfiguration, Elijah appeared with Jesus and Moses. Elijah's return was to be the herald who would prepare the Lord's way, making the paths straight, proclaiming new life in God.

Let's look at John the Baptist's LinkedIn® page! A voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the highway, prepare the Way of the Lord." The prophetic voice anticipates the twelve's mission—healing, releasing, and opening up the knowledge that the kingdom of heaven has come near. Moreover, John the Baptist was an astute judge of character, much to Antipas' wife Herodias (one of ten!), who, under Jewish law, was not legally able to



Panoramic view of Machaerus with the Dead Sea in the background. Believed to be where John was beheaded



Antipas' coins

marry Herod. A line from Congreve's 1697 play, *The Mourning Bride*, 'Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.' A new Jezebel was about to plot the downfall of one of her most vocal critics.

All of the Gospels emphasise that John was the herald of the One who is to come. Right at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, the Good News of Jesus Christ commences with Jesus being baptised by John. John was not the Messiah; he was the one to herald Jesus' ministry. His death and headless burial are essential to establish that those who saw John as the Messiah were not correct.

So we get to the point of asking today, well, if you are off the street and don't know a thing about Jesus, what good news do you pick up? Unless you've been following the story so far, this would be the same as watching a television serial having never seen the pilot episode.

We need to read the text in the context of time, place and narrative. Mark is telling us a story. We could read

Josephus's account written around the time of Herod Antipas' fall in 39 CE or look to Oscar Wilde's play and libretto of the opera *Salome* and indulge in the dance of seven veils. But without the narrative of Jesus' rejection and the alluding to the necessity of his execution, the story, whilst standing alone, requires more fleshing out.



Our pew sheet publishes readings for today and for next week. Suppose you reread last week, this week and next in one sitting. Revisit it with your bible. Whilst we use the New Revised Standard Anglicised Version here in Church, most English translations are fairly competent and accurate. If you don't have a bible or access to the internet to read online, let me know. A bible can be found easily enough. This entire Chapter 6 is full of questions. Who, where, why, what... To quote Sir Humphrey Appleby in "Yes, Prime Minister", "these are good questions, indeed, very good questions." (!)

Today's reading reminds us of the need to see who Jesus is in context and why John the Baptist fulfilled scripture in

preparing the way. Now, Herod Antipas is aware of not only Jesus but also the ministry of the twelve. Not surprisingly, he is afraid, fed by the guilt of what happened to John.

There is a small crumb in the reading. Jesus invites the twelve to come on a break to recoup, but as we will soon read, despite being exhausted, the crowds continue to build and follow. The interlude gives way to a fishy story with a couple of stale loaves there.

All good stories have a little bit of drama along the way. Sometimes, the readings take us to places we would instead not go. The Word of God reminds us of God's presence even in our most difficult places, leading us out of darkness and into the divine's marvellous light. Each part of the Word of God illuminates us all. Sometimes, it is helpful to remember that shadows only exist because of light.

This is a story of hope, our journey, and our needs. Even in the darkest places, God is still with us, working on what is good and righteous despite our human failings. God forgives our human weaknesses in Jesus' name when we ask to begin again, be it now or in the life of the world to come.

All this was foreshadowed by a voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the

Way of the Lord." That same voice continues to call for us now beyond the grave. Make the straight path. The Lord is near.

Icebreaker!



What would it be if you could only eat one type of food for the rest of your life?



GROUP DISCUSSION

Question 1

Why do you think Jesus was rejected by his town and considered mad by his own family?

Context

Jesus faced rejection from his village and was considered mad by his family before sending out the disciples.

Application

Have you ever experienced rejection from people close to you when trying to share your faith? How did you handle it?

Question 2

How can understanding the context of time, place, and narrative help us engage with biblical texts?

Context

The importance of reading the text in its context

Application

What steps can you take to understand better the context when reading the Bible?

Context

John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy from Isaiah, preparing the way for Jesus' ministry.

Application

What are some ways we can be like John the Baptist in our own lives and help prepare the way for Jesus in the lives of others?

Question 3

Why was John the Baptist's role crucial in preparing the way for Jesus?

Question 4

What was the significance of Herod Antipas fearing that Jesus might be John the Baptist resurrected?

Context

Herod feared when he heard that some people thought Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected, as he executed John due to peer pressure from the court.



Application

How can listening to peer pressure impact our decisions, and what can we do to stay true to our faith despite such pressures?

Context

God is present in difficult situations, leading us from darkness into divine light.

Application

Can you share an experience when you felt God's presence during a difficult situation in your life?

Question 5

How does Jesus' ministry show God's presence even in difficult situations?

End notes and further reading

N.T. Wright, **Paul for Everyone, Ephesians**, Westminster John Knox Press

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Mark

Volume 2 of Sacra Pagina

Authors John R. Donahue, Daniel J. Harrington

Publisher Liturgical Press, 2016

- Thank God for sending people out to spread His message.
- Ask God to help us understand who Jesus is in our context today.
- Seek help in seeing God's presence even in challenging times.



Brabarlung Totem
This is produced on
Gunaikurnai Land, and our
respects are paid to the First
Nations people everywhere.



A winter interlude

5 Day Devotional

This five-day devotional will deepen the sermon from this weekend. We will explore the themes of faith, hope, and the role of John the Baptist in heralding Jesus's ministry. Each day will provide a core scripture and a reflection to help guide your spiritual journey.

Day 1 Mark 6:14-29

In this passage, we encounter the grim tale of John the Baptist's beheading at Herodias's request. John, who prepared the way for Jesus, became a victim of political intrigue and personal vendetta. This story serves as a reminder of the cost of discipleship and the courage required to stand for truth and justice.

John's life and death were a testament to his unwavering commitment to God's mission. He was the voice crying out in the wilderness, compelling people to prepare the way for the Lord. Even in his death, John pointed people to Jesus, emphasising that he must decrease so Christ could increase.

How can you prepare the way for the Lord in your own life?

What sacrifices are you willing to make for your faith?

How does John's story inspire you to stand for truth?

Pray for the courage to stand firm in your faith like John the Baptist.

Ask God to reveal ways you can pave the way for His work in your community.

Day 2 Luke 1:17

This scripture speaks of John the Baptist coming in the "spirit and power of Elijah" to prepare the hearts of the people for the Lord. John's role was to baptise and turn people back to God, setting the stage for Jesus' ministry.

John's mission was significant because it fulfilled the prophecies that Elijah would return before the Messiah. He called people to repentance and baptised them as a sign of their commitment to change. His life urges us to reflect on our commitment to God and how we can prepare our hearts and lives for Christ.

In what ways can you turn your heart back to God?

How can you prepare your community for the coming of the Lord?

What does repentance look like in your daily life?

Pray for a repentant heart that is open to God's transformation.

Seek God's guidance on how to inspire others to turn towards Him.

Day 3 Matthew 3:3

This verse reiterates John's purpose: "Who cries out in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him." John's call was clear and direct, urging people to remove obstacles that hinder their relationship with God.

The straight paths symbolise a life of obedience and faithfulness to God's word. Just as John called people to prepare for Jesus' coming, we are called today to make our lives a testimony to God's transformative power. Our lives should reflect the straight path made for Christ.

What obstacles need to be removed to prepare a straight path for God?

How can you live a life of obedience and faithfulness?

What areas of your life need transformation to reflect God's love?

Pray that God helps you identify and remove obstacles in your spiritual journey.

Ask for strength to remain obedient and faithful to God's teachings.

Day 4 John 1:23

John's declaration, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, make straight the way for the Lord," encapsulates his entire ministry. He was a preparer, allowing Jesus to be revealed as the Messiah. His call was urgent and vital, emphasising the need to be ready for the Lord's coming.

John's role reminds us of the importance of our witness. We, too, are called to be voices in the wilderness, preparing the way for others to meet Christ. By living lives that reflect God's love, we can help others find their way to Him.

How can you be a voice in the wilderness in your community?
What steps can you take to prepare the way for others to find Christ?
In what ways can your life be a reflection of Christ's love?
Pray for the urgency to share the good news of Jesus with those around you.
Seek ways to witness God's love in your daily life actively.

Day 5 Mark 1:1-11

The beginning of the Gospel of Mark recounts John's baptism of Jesus, marking the start of Jesus' public ministry. This significant event underscores the transition from John's preparatory work to Jesus' messianic mission. John's acknowledgement of Jesus' superiority and humility set an example for us.

As we conclude this devotional, we are reminded that John the Baptist's entire life was dedicated to pointing others to Christ. Our mission is no different. We are called to live in a way that directs others to the saving grace of Jesus, preparing a path for Him in the hearts of those around us.

How can you point others to Christ in your everyday interactions?
What can you learn from John's humility and dedication?
In what ways can you support the ministry of Jesus in your community?
Pray for a heart that constantly seeks to glorify Jesus above all else.
Ask God to help you be a guiding light for others to find Christ.

Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

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