

*The Lessons Appointed for Use on the*

**Sunday closest to July 13**

**Year B**

**Proper 10**

**RCL**



**Amos 7:7-15**

**Psalms 85:8-13**

**Mark 6:14-29**

**The Collect**

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

So David went and brought up the ark of God

from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings

and offerings of well-being before the LORD.

When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

Amos 7:7-15

This is what the Lord God showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said,

“See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by;  
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,  
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,  
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words.

For thus Amos has said,

‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword,  
and Israel must go into exile  
away from his land.’”

And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

**Psalm 85:8-13 Page 709, BCP**

*Benedixisti, Domine*

8 I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, for he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him.

9 Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

10 Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

11 Truth shall spring up from the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

12 The LORD will indeed grant prosperity, and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness shall go before him, and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

**Ephesians 1:3-14**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the



fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Mark 6:14-29

king Herod heard of the demons cast out and the many who were anointed and cured, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge

against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king

and requested, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

## SERMON

Something was going on in Jerusalem!

King Herod heard of the demons cast out and the many who were anointed and cured, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

Something was happening in Judea that needed explanation. People were being cured, and demons were being driven out. Some thought John had been raised from the dead. Some thought that the prophets of old, Elijah maybe, were returned to bring the Word of God to His

people. Most surprisingly, Herod, who we've been taught to think of as a one-dimensional villain, said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

Remarkable. Can you hear the guilt and regret in Herod's voice? Have you ever done something you later really regretted, something you knew was wrong but did anyway, and got away with it? Nobody was dunning you over it, but you knew you had done wrong, even if the whole world thought otherwise? We're really peculiar animals. We have morals. We know when we have been false to them, and sometimes, we find we can't move on to the rest of our lives until the bad thing is paid for. The guilt we feel stands as a big road block to the way into the future. Herod, the man we have been taught to view as just a one-

dimensional marker for evil, stands in for all of us who have had that experience.

Mark's account tells us of the strange relationship between John and Herod:

... Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.

Herod, the Roman-approved king of everything you're looking at, liked to listen to John the Baptist, yet he also killed John once Herodias tricked him into making a promise to her. What is going through Herod's mind as all Jerusalem is in an uproar? That which once seemed so pleasant to him has ended by his own hand, and he knows and regrets it. The man he protected died by his order. That awful time, which he thought was

buried in his dungeon, out of sight, out of mind, is now moving through Jerusalem. What is going through Herod's mind?

We all know what it is to intend to do something good and to do something evil despite our best intentions. Herod lived a commitment to his promises so strong that it would permit him to kill John rather than be false to it. That's what can happen if we're not careful. Our attempts to be righteous will turn against us and lead us into great evil because we are human, and humans are touched by sin. Left to our own devices, we just don't have it in us to decide the righteous path.

But Herod was the villain of the whole story, wasn't he? Can't we just assume that Herod did



bad stuff because Herod was a bad guy, unlike our own righteous selves, and leave it at that?

Um...no. I have trouble with the whole good guy/bad guy division. It seems to me to be the case that very few people wake up in the morning and think, "I'm going to spend my day doing something despicable. Let's see...who can I offend or hurt today?" Even the people I dealt with as Commonwealth's Attorney usually had some sort of explanation for what they did. It generally wasn't a very good explanation, but it was an explanation of sorts. They weren't shoplifting to buy drugs. They were shoplifting to get money to buy food for the baby because after they paid for their drugs, there wasn't enough money left to feed the baby. And don't get all self-righteous on

me. Everyone here has done dumb things.

When I hear Herod's words, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised", in my mind's eye I see him sitting alone, in despair, face-to-face with the enormity of what he had done, and realizing that his sins had returned to confront him. "I killed my friend, who I liked to listen to even though he left me perplexed. Why did I do such a thing? Oh, to be able to recall my hand from the terrible thing I have done." Which of us hasn't shared this experience? Which of us is free of regret and shame over things we did which caused harm?

Jesus and John figure so prominently in the accounts of the story of Jesus that we forget that Israel was filled with living, feeling people, peo-

ple trying to navigate this thing that had happened. They are so many, that we dehumanize them: Herod is the villain. The woman with the flow of blood. The Samaritan woman. These aren't markers. They aren't characters. These are people with all the perplexing inconsistencies we all experience. It's by looking at the people around Jesus that we can come to understand what is happening in Jerusalem and how perplexing it must have seemed to the people there.

By contrast, 2,000 years later we can read this account from our recliner and never be stirred by it. We're too accustomed to the Jesus story. We know how it turns out, but Herod didn't have that luxury and the people in the streets knew only that something had happened in Jerusalem

that needed an explanation. We're too quick with the approved explanation. We can rely on it, and never bother to become entangled with Jesus. I remember, years ago, a discussion with an old policeman who was telling me his thoughts on what we should do with the Russians who were the enemies de jure, if you will recall. It wasn't pretty. I suggested that Jesus taught that we should love our enemies. I have never forgotten his response, "Well, that's Jesus. I'm not that good."

We're too sure of what we think we know about Jesus and because of that, we can comfortably avoid being entangled in the story. We might even take the course of the policeman and say "Well that's Jesus. I'm not that good." and be satisfied with that answer. Herod had become entangled

and we meet him here, not as the villain of the piece but as a fallible, regretful, and tortured human, who now knows that his own ideas of personal righteousness, his faithfulness to his promises had led him to depths of evil.

Herod is all of us, every one. No one wakes in the morning and decides to do something despicable, but the capacity of the human heart to invent good reasons to do bad things is literally limitless. Never let that leave your mind. It is a marvelous antidote to the disease of self-righteousness.

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn famously reminded us:

**If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?**

It is perhaps the most important piece of wisdom I could give to you. We often do our greatest harm when we think we are acting righteously.

Until we meet again,  
May the Love of God the Father,  
The Grace of God the Son  
and the Communion of God the Holy Spirit abide  
with you.

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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