

Go!

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Quite a story in our Gospel lesson. A lot of folks preaching on the Epistle today. I can imagine someone hearing it for the first time and saying “Well yuck”. I mean heads on platters; and it’s the head of the one who came to announce and prepare the way for Jesus. They just shot the messenger.

Herod, in this story, is not Herod the Great who was in power at Jesus birth, but his successor Herod Antipas before who Jesus appeared before the Crucifixion. Herod was both fascinated by his talks with John and resentful of John’s disapproval of his marriage to Herodias, Herod’s brother’s wife. That was why he had John imprisoned, but he was still fascinated by him and wanted him where he could find him. He hid him, but essentially in plain sight, and that’s significant too.

It’s very easy to get caught up in the evil and tragedy of the story. Flannery O’Connor has said, however, that there is a moment in every story when the presence of grace can be felt, as it waits to be accepted or rejected, even though the reader may not recognize this moment.

I think our task today is to search for that moment of grace that redeems the story, the stream of grace that flows within deep recesses of a gruesome narrative.

Evil and discord are rife in this story. Herod’s Court is a world of lust, corruption and power. The times seem so far removed from our world and yet

The media shows us every day images of needless deaths and tragedies and the fruits of corruption and racism; of the death of innocents, like John the Baptist, and Jesus.

Again John was hidden in plain sight while Herod decided what to do with him. Our churches and our world have people, hidden in plain sight, dealing with their own stories of agony: deaths of loved ones, violence, broken relationship, addiction, abuse. Where is the grace for them? Where is the Grace in our Gospel story?

You’ve observed, no doubt, parallels in this story and the death of Jesus. So maybe the grace in John’s story, in our stories, is found in the same place as in the crucifixion story.

It’s a grace that does not gloss over the pain. What happened after John’s death? His friends came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb. What happened to Jesus—they took him, prepared him for burial, and laid him in a tomb.

Friends, -instruments of God's peace, came to tend to victims of tragedy. Friends, exhibiting Grace, necessary for the resurrection story; friends, with God's help, have been and still are the instruments of Grace.

What are we called to do but to be instruments of healing and grace to a world broken by strife, tragedy fear, hate, violence. We see tragedies every day, and while I believe in prayer, the term "thoughts and prayers" seem to be modern code for "we're not going to do anything, but we're going to sound really sincere while we're not doing it". As the Dalai Lama says "Our primary purpose in life is to help others and if we cannot help them, at least don't hurt them" As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said "not to act is to act". Our inaction hurts people.

We are called each in our own way to come to the wounded and, to bathe the wounds and bring that Grace of God's love. Ann Lamott says "Grace always bats last," or "Grace bats cleanup—in the end God steps in and brings us safely home."

But he needs us. Often quoted: Christ has no body now but ours. No hands, no feet on earth but ours. Ours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Ours are the hands, ours the feet, and we are his body.

We look at the horror of John's beheading, but Grace redeems the narrative. Like John's and Jesus's followers, the text comes to claim the body. It tenderly holds the broken and scarred tissue of devastated lives as it groans for resurrection.

Those friends acted and we must act. It's been said, as you know "The way for evil to triumph is for men of good will to do nothing." We can all do something.

The Rule of Life Bishop Curry presented at general convention included the word GO. Move beyond our comfort to witness to the love of God with words and actions.

Listen to our benediction which tells us where we are to go.

May we go, tenderly hold the broken and the weak, knowing that Grace redeems us all. May we think our good thoughts and say those prayers, but ultimately we must GO!