

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
July 12, 2015

If you've ever searched online for how to do something you might come across the popular [wikihow.com](http://www.wikihow.com). This site helps give instructions to people so they can better their lives through learning.¹ One of their articles gives 10 steps on "How to Win an Argument when You Know You are Wrong." A few steps include 1) recognizing the situation, 2) go on the offense, 3) inundate your opponent with questions, and 4) use faulty cause and effect. And the steps end with a ploy to end the debate quickly and move on while declaring your victory.

And today's Gospel reading is a flashback that is a bit faced paced, like those steps, and the story also seems to justify the end result. You may have noticed that we don't actually see Jesus in this entire periscope. Yet, Jesus is the catalyst for this flashback. During the flashback we know the Herod has arrested John, but kept him in prison and protected him. Herod had married his brother's wife, Herodias, and Herodias has a huge chip on her shoulder against John the Baptist. So at Herod's birthday Herodias' daughter comes dancing and pleasing the guests. Which it awkward, right? Like, it's your stepdaughter Herod, really?

Anyway, as a result, Herod makes a promise to give her whatever she wants, and she goes to her mother, Herodias, who knew it was her chance to get rid of John. So Herodias' daughter asks for John the Baptist's head. And, "oh crap," Herod thinks. In our translation we read that Herod was "deeply grieved." The word here where we get "deeply grieved" is only used one other place in Mark and that's in Mark 14:34 when Jesus was in the garden before he was betrayed. This word was describing the state of mind and soul of Jesus.² So here we find Herod with a tough decision. Herod is in front of his guests and he knew he made a promise, so instead of rescinding his promise he let them chop off John's head. Here Herod didn't even need the wikihow article, he followed through on what would make him present best and keep his power in spite of his deep sorrow and the wrestling of his soul.

¹ <http://www.wikihow.com/wikiHow>About-wikiHow>

² <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2012/07/randy-sots-and-righteous-prophets.html>

The writing of this story alone helps bring the truth out about the situation. As one colleague wonders, is Herod either: 1) caught in his own promise and actually remorseful or 2) begin that the Roman Empire's methodology used death as a controlling force, did Herod use death to show his guests his power?³ Either way, "deeply grieving" seems to indicate that there's something going on in Herod that is ignored or rejected. Especially after Herod goes from protecting John to beheading him.

And I think we've all been caught there in the middle of a decision while we try to figure out the best way to proceed. Like maybe when we've been skating on thin ice with our boss and this month isn't looking good. Do we use the wikihow's advice and use faulty cause and effect or do we tell the truth? Or maybe we totally forgot something super important for our significant other - what do we do? We could try to "win" the argument by going on the offense, or we could stand up and claim responsibility. Over and again in life we've got choices on how we proceed - from the simple choice if we do clean up the spilled milk on the break room counter to the ways we vote on a jury leading to the death penalty. We've all got difficult decisions to make - will we gloss it over to claim our power or will we tell the truth?

This truth telling is hard work. It's the work we do many weeks during confession. Our worship and the Bible give us its own "how to" article. For here we often confess our sins at the beginning of the service. To emphasize the "how to" of truth telling we're offering them up during the sermon. In your bulletin you should find a small white piece of paper. I'm going to give you some time to tell the truth about places where you've been faced with tough decisions and perhaps erred towards the ego. Write that on the paper. Perhaps it's a place where you've felt you've missed the mark this week, month, or year. (Silence) Another way to confess this week is to think about Luther's view of sin - namely "to be curved inward on yourself" - in what ways have you been curved inward or self-centered this week? (Silence.) Now I'd ask the ushers to collect these papers and bring them forward. (Papers are placed in a large fish tank in the front of the assembly.)

These papers might be things we hold on to - like the paper itself. It can be hard to let the ways we've missed the mark go, but it can also be harder to truly recognize the ways we have missed the mark. A lot of times we think we're perfect. Yet we have individuals like John the Baptist and Jesus who call to mind the ways we don't love and care for others. We have prophets that remind us of the need to care for the environment, prophets that remind us of the need to welcome all people or of the call of our God to be

³ Idid

active in creating a world of love and grace. And so often we too, like Herod, tell untruths or let things go – those sins of commission and omission destroy our lives and our world.

It is gathered here in confession that we are given the opportunity to own up to the truth about our world and ourselves to embrace the biblical “how to” of truth telling. As we pray the Lord’s Prayer each week saying “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,” or in other words, “forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.” Each week we say that as our confession.

And standing opposed to the way of the world that covers the truth and creates “how to” lists to win an argument when you know you’re wrong, in light of all that, let us confess our sins together using the printed in your bulletin. God of all, **we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed. We have told lies, said hurtful things, acted in ways we wish we could take back, and looked the other way when action was needed. In your mercy, O God, forgive us, cleanse us, and heal us, for the sake of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.**

Friends, today’s gospel is a tough one. It doesn’t appear at face value to offer much grace and hope. Today’s gospel, however, does present the truth. In the story we know that John is beheaded. We also know that Jesus is seen as the resurrected version of John. The idea of resurrection in Jesus time was actually quite frequent. One scholar reminds us that to think that Jesus is the only person that folks saw as resurrected would be inaccurate. Resurrection meant someone who rose from the dead to empower others to do what oneself was doing before death. Jesus’ resurrection was not “unique” in the sense of “this is something no one ever imagined might happen!” No, instead Jesus’ resurrection means something more like, “Resurrection happened to this one.” Jesus becomes the one who fits the existing category of resurrection, rather than resurrection being a predicate of who Jesus is.⁴ In other words, John and Jesus are carrying along something super powerful, namely the in breaking of God’s presence in the world. John and Jesus are both challenging the structures of power that are death-centric. In their resurrections the foundation of death is denied and the entire structure of the empire begins to crumble.

And today we’re reminded that the story doesn’t end with John’s lifeless body lying in the tomb. Instead the life that John led, the truth telling about the world continues to be carried on in Jesus’ ministry. The biblical “how to” be a truth teller lives on. And we also know that the disciples were sent and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and so too you,

⁴ Ibid.

you were filled with the Holy Spirit and sent into the world in your baptism. (Pastor begins pouring water onto the paper in the fish tank.) In your baptism you were reminded that death does not have the final word - for the life giving, sustaining word, the power in truth telling, and the crumbling of the structures of oppression don't have the last word. As you were immersed in the waters of baptism you could not grasp the sins in the same way before. Much as the papers have been dissolved in this water you cannot hold them tight. (Dissolving paper! 😊)

My friends, receive forgiveness from our God:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:

everything old has passed away;

everything has become new!

In Christ, + you are a new creation:

your sins are taken away and you are made new.

Amen.

My friends, go forth this day. Be reminded with this text that you are a part of a long lineage of truth tellers. Go strive to be different from Herod and the Roman Empire. Go strive to live a life of truth and life. Go and be reminded that in all you do you are filled with the Holy Spirit and you are made new. Amen.