

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Mark 6: 14-29
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 July 12, 2015

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, you have the power to say "**I love you**" or to say "**I hate you**." Which power do you like better? You have the power to do many things. Which do you want to be doing in your life?

- **Hurt** people or **help** people
- Say "**thank you**" or **not**
- Expect your **parents to do all the work** around home or to **help**
- **Tell the truth** or **lie**
- **Share food** or **waste food**
- **Keep the earth clean** or **throw garbage** on the ground
- **Break promises** or **keep promises**
- **Say nice things** or say **bad things**
- **Pray to God** or **don't pray**
- **Hit people** or **hug people**
- **Frown** or **smile**
- **Believe** that **Jesus loves you** or that **nobody loves you**?

Kids, God has given us the **power of God's love in Jesus** so that we can have good and joyful lives. God has promised to love us and to take care of us. And God has promised to help us to love and care for other people and the earth. Jesus came to love all the people in the world. Then he said, "**Will you help me?**" **Will you help Jesus to love the world?**

Will you sing with me? "**Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.**"

Thanks. And thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

King Herod had some power. But he only had as much power as the Romans would allow him. Herod was puppet king over Israel, installed by the occupying Roman army. And King Herod had a birthday so he threw a little birthday banquet. Anybody who was anybody was invited to Herod's party. John the Baptist came to the banquet, but not all of him. When the

party started, John was sitting in Herod's prison. But by the end, John's head was chopped off and delivered to Herod's birthday banquet on a platter. Are things really worse in our world now than they were then?

John the Baptist was the prophet sent by God to announce Jesus' coming and to invite people to turn back to God. John brought **good news of God's loving, saving, life-giving power** which was coming in Jesus. John invited people to welcome Jesus into their world and lives. John even got to baptize Jesus.

Meanwhile, back at the party, King Herod's wife's daughter performed a seductive dance and Herod was so excited and pleased that he offered to grant her any wish. Powerful people can do most anything you know. Herod's illegitimate wife hated John the Baptist because John publically condemned Herod for stealing her from his brother. So she told her daughter to ask for John's head on a platter and that's what she did. Herod kind of liked John the Baptist, had protected him so far, but a promise is a promise when people are watching. That day Herod's power killed God's messenger John. John the Baptist died at the hands of human power.

Your boss has power over you. So does the police officer. And the tax assessor. And the governor. So does the drunk driver approaching you on the highway.

Power. **John dies at the hands of abusive, hateful power.** Power. John's death is an alert that the same end awaits Jesus. Jesus will also die at the hands of abusive, hateful power. Herod had power. Both John and Jesus died at the hands of human power.

Herod gave a banquet for the select people of the area. And it cost John his life. **Jesus gave some banquets too** – for the 5,000 seekers on a hillside, for the woman of the street, for the tax collectors and sinners, for the hungry, sick, ostracized. People were **given life at Jesus' banquet.**

When John and Jesus proclaimed **God's kingdom of grace** the powers of the world did not receive them well. When Jesus and John told how much God cares about **truth, justice, love and mercy** – the powers that be killed them. The **status quo** did them in. . . . That's what happens to most anyone who speaks up in the face of destructive, life-stealing power. We humans would often **rather have things stay the way they are, bad as**

they might be, rather than risk change. And so we too often let human power tell us what we need to do, or not do, or pretend isn't happening. . . Power, who's in power and who's not? And how is power used?

In Jesus' day:

- Men could divorce their wives over burned breakfast, but wives could only get a divorce if their husbands committed adultery.
- Women during their period were considered unclean, because of the bleeding, and were not allowed to come to worship or even to be with other people.
- The earth was flat.
- Slavery was accepted.
- If there was something wrong in your life it was because you had sinned and God was punishing you.

In Martin Luther's day:

- You had to buy your way into heaven.
- If you made a pilgrimage to the site of some ancient saint's grave, you stood a better chance of getting into heaven.
- If the prince or king became Lutheran/Catholic, every citizen had to become Lutheran/Catholic along with them.

In American colonial days:

- The colonists came to America for freedom of religion, but mostly insisted that newcomers had to believe what the founders of the colony believed in order to be allowed to settle there.
- If a woman was suspected of witchcraft, she would be tied to a pole contraption and lowered into a pond. If she floated, she was guilty and would be killed. If she sank, she was innocent, but drowned anyway.
- Native people had to take on European culture, dress and education in order to become Christian. They had to disavow the way that they had been living for all of their history.

At the beginning of the 20th century:

- The earth was created in seven 24 hour days.
- Chemical dependency was a sin not a disease.
- Divorced people were shunned from the church.
- People of different races couldn't be married.

In our own day:

- We still struggle with **abortion**, **same sex unions**, **global climate change**, **immigration**, **drug addiction**, **homelessness**, **hunger**, **violence**, **terrorism**, **racism**, **consumerism**, the ever growing

gap between the rich and the poor. . . God struggles along with us. . . . One hundred years from now, what will the result of our struggles be? Will the world have changed? Will these things have been decided according to God's will for the world?

Herod had a little banquet. Herod had power. His banquet brought separation and death.

The **South Carolina racist** had some power when he shot the nine people in their church. So did the **families of the victims** when they forgave him. So did the **legislature and governor** when they took down the Confederate flag.

I have some power. As a pastor, standing up here in front of everyone, I have the power to influence many people with what I say and do. I was raised in a **union family**. My father faithfully worked at Diamond Tool and Horseshoe Company for 38 years. When he started, conditions for the employees were near hellish. Thanks to the AFLCIO Union, things got much better – pay, health care, insurance to cover injuries, safety, etc. Dad swore by the union. He did have **reservations though**, about people not doing an honest day's work and still being protected by the union. Maybe the union sometimes went too far.

In my first call, I had the chance to get to know one of my **parishioners who started his own metal fabricating shop**. He started it in Outing in order to provide decent paying jobs to local people. He wanted them to have the chance to work in their own community. During the early years, he struggled hard to maintain cash flow. Customers often failed to pay their bills and then he struggled to pay his employees. He got behind on his government loan payments. At the same time someone tried to organize a union to ask for more benefits for employees. Finally, the Small Business Administration demanded that he make his loan payments or close. He had more money owed to him than he owed on his loan. He had to close. **He lost his business** and **everyone lost their jobs**. **No winners**.

I have learned that there **needs to be a balance** between workers and management. There is a pendulum that swings between owner and worker. Both parties are needed for successful production and fair compensation. As a pastor, I need to care about both ends of the

spectrum. I need to advocate for everyone when I preach. Where is the middle ground? Who has the power? Can the power and wealth of this nation be shared? Can the power and wealth of this world be shared? And **where is God's will** in all of **this and in every other issue** we face?

Jesus wasn't at Herod's banquet. Jesus wasn't invited. Jesus has his own banquet. We call it "**The Lord's Supper**." **Jesus invites everyone**. That banquet is a culmination of Jesus' whole life and work. Instead of prestigious guests, exotic dances, and heads chopped off, Jesus says, "**This is my body given for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins**."

Jesus has a banquet. Jesus has power. Jesus died at the hands of human power. Then Jesus rose again and **came back with the power of God's love**. **God's power of love brings to the table - forgiveness, healing, peace, hope, even joy** and a **promise for a better tomorrow**.

We spend most of our lives being confronted by Herod's kind of hurtful, destructive power. Read the paper. Watch the news. Look around you. **But Jesus isn't satisfied to leave us there**. Jesus is not satisfied with the status quo. Our **National Youth Gathering group**, in Minneapolis and Detroit, will see where the **power of the world** has been **at work to drain life** from our world. And they will see where the **power of God's love** is **at work to give forgiveness, healing, peace, hope, even joy** and a **promise for a better tomorrow**.

God gives our **faith family at First Lutheran God's power of love**. And God's love brings forgiveness, healing, peace, hope, even joy and a promise for a better tomorrow. **Together** we have the power of the world to be **selfish and hurtful**. Or we have the power of God to be **loving and helpful**. **You** have the power of the world to be **selfish and hurtful**. Or you have the power of God to be **loving and helpful**.

Jesus, our **Rock**, our **Savior** – the One who **loves us enough to die for us** – **God is the source of our power to give life**, to **bring blessing**, to **shape this world**, even just in small ways, to be **more loving, compassionate and life-giving for everyone**. Herod had power. That power killed John. Right here today, **we have God's power of love**. What are we going to do with it? Thanks be to God. Amen.