

# WESLEY UNITING CHURCH, FORREST, ACT.

## PENTECOST 8

9am Liturgy

Sunday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024



### Auguste Rodin's (1840-1917) John the Baptist.

Rodin's sculptural work on John the Baptist is penetrating. John's long hair and beard, his sunken cheeks, evoke the ascetic life the man lived in the deserts. Moreover, the depth of the eyes gives the impression of an intense gaze, and the open mouth and chin slightly raised, convey an attitude of intense concentration and faith. As was his practice, Rodin based the bust of John on an actual person: an Italian peasant from the Abruzzi region called Pignatelli. Who agreed to pose for him. Rodin himself explained how the man caught his attention. *"As soon as I saw him, I was filled with admiration: this rough, hairy man, expressed violence in his bearing, his feature and his physical strength, yet also the mystical character of his race. I immediately thought of a Saint John the Baptist. In other words, a man of nature, a visionary, a believer, a precursor who came to announce one greater than himself."*

These few weeks we have been following Mark's readings which have to do with demons and demonology, an ancient way of understanding human suffering, experienced through natural events, illness, as well as cultural, social and political structures. For Mark, with its setting in Rome, which was initially hostile to Christians, suffering was a lived daily reality, where Christians had to keep their heads beneath the parapet. The great irony in Mark is that while Christian identity invites persecution and pain, it is precisely human alienation that God in Jesus, comes to remedy. The invitation of Mark is that Christians persevere, last the distance, as they reach forward to the kingdom of God.

Today, we hear of the demons, in their political form as Herod, Herodias and Salome, conspire to murder John the Baptizer. In our discussion time we examine the question that derives from the narrative of John's execution: *the deep Christian doubt about the state* - a view which shocks many believers. For the children we will focus upon the reading from Ephesians about how the world is embraced by love, to which we Christians are invited to live out.

## THE GATHERING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

### News and Notices

### Acknowledgement of First Nation's People

### A Safe Space

### Welcome and Invocation of the Trinity

### Lighting the Pascal Candle

### Call to Worship

When we witness our work bear good fruit and rejoice in all God has done among us...

**we gather for worship.**

When misunderstanding and misinformation threaten to divide instead of unite us...

**we gather for worship.**

When we dance together in the joy of knowing we belong to God and one another...

**we gather for worship.**

When we stumble and bumble our way forward as God's grace guides us into greater love and deeper communion...

**we gather for worship.**

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

## Welcoming Song:

### A Prayer: "A Black Eucharist"

In this prayer we focus on the Gospel reading for today – the story of the execution of John the Baptizer. The theology for this prayer and for this whole liturgy has to do with the sacrament of eucharist. Mark is about to speak of two feasts; one celebrating the bread of life for Israel – the feeding of the 5000, and one celebrating the bread of life for the Gentiles, the feeding of the 4000. When he reports Jesus' discussion of the significance of these two miraculous feedings in 8:14-20, Mark begins by reminding us of the 'leaven' of Herod (8:16). We are meant to see the link. Mark connects the three feasts under the rubric of 'leaven' or bread. The feedings of the 5000 and 4000 foreshadow this meal of life through Christ. *Herod's feast is the counterpoint. It is a black eucharist: John's head is brought forward on a platter at the height of its 'liturgy'.*

Lamp light catches the edge of the sword  
just before its swing,  
and for an instant John has  
a memory of sunlight  
dancing on water  
and droplets glittering in air  
as his hands poured the waters of Jordan  
over the bowed head of one  
who, standing there,  
has brought all hope  
into one sharp focus.  
He smiles,  
his heart already soaring  
toward the approaching dove.

### Our Confession and Reconciliation

Let us be still and listen to the voice of God  
Let us confess

*Silence*

That we claim to follow Jesus Christ,  
as vehicles for and expressions of life,  
but our worldview and values fail are harsh and death-dealing,  
**as a black-eucharist.**

That we claim to follow Jesus Christ,  
as means to life for others,  
but our relationships are harsh and death-dealing,  
judgmental, lacking in generosity,  
**as a black eucharist.**

That we claim to follow Jesus Christ,  
but we do so through shallow habit,  
not thinking through what following means  
from context to context, situation to situation, person to person.

**We live out a black eucharist, not the real one.**

### Declaration of Forgiveness

We are all beggars.  
Our species is deeply compromised.  
We are all creatures driven by unending doubts,  
obsessed with power, abusing power,  
restless, unhappy, if only we could see it.  
But the good news is this: we are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God!**

### The Peace

## LISTENING AND SHARING

**A Chat with the Children: A Story - "The Man who Loved Boxes":** How love shows itself in quite strange ways: a short meditation on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and how divine love frees us to live lovingly.

### Readings: Ephesians 1:3-14

*Paul in Ephesians maintains a broad view of reality. In Christ reality, the world, the cosmos is potentially transformed. This section is all about Christians as lovers of love. This letter is all about ultimate values. Paul sees love in Christ's death. In divine love we are forgiven and free to live lovingly. In turn the larger vision, the mystery is God's desire to bring the whole of creation together as one with Christ as its head.*

<sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. <sup>5</sup>He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup>that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup>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, <sup>12</sup>so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>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; <sup>14</sup>this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

### Gospel: Mark 6:14-29

*This gospel reading should be read "intertextuality". What that means is that in this reading Mark takes up previous texts from the Hebrew Bible, draws meaning from them, and adds meaning in the retelling of this account of John's execution. This story of John echoes the drunken King Ahasuerus dispatching with Queen Vashti because she did not respond to a besotted request (Esther 1), and Solomon's son Rehoboam following the advice of his young, foolish 'frat' friends, instead of the wise elders, when confronted with a reasonable request from his people (I Kings 12). If we read this story intertextually, it is about royal hubris, arrogance, entitlement. It highlights Herod's own responsibility, not permitting a projection of guilt upon his conniving illegitimate wife and her daughter. The women of Herod's house are guilty enough, but the intertextual reading shows that kings do exactly what God said they do in I Samuel 8.*

<sup>14</sup>King Herod heard of it, 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." <sup>15</sup>But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." <sup>16</sup>But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

<sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." <sup>19</sup>And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. <sup>22</sup>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." <sup>23</sup>And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." <sup>24</sup>She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." <sup>25</sup>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." <sup>26</sup>The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. <sup>27</sup>Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, <sup>28</sup>brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. <sup>29</sup>When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

**The Gospel of the Lord, Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ**

## **Introduction to Our Discussion**

**Let's think together about the Gospel Reading on John the Baptist's death and the Church's subsequent interpretation of the state.**

## **Prayers for the Church and World**

Today we pray for the peoples of Djibouti and Somalia. We remember the peoples of Gaza, as bombardment continues in the south and the communities relocate yet again in fear of their lives. We pray for the people of Israel, who with their history as victims, live as victims creating victims, in a forever-war that has no psychological or practical end. We pray for the peoples of Russia, where their memory of empire, demands the conquest of Ukraine.

## **Offering Song**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.

Peace

Invitation

Story

Eucharistic Prayer

Sanctus and Consecration

Agnus Dei

We Share the Elements of Christ's Life, Death and Resurrection 'in the round'

## **LEAVING**

Leaving Song:

**Blessing**    Go in peace, and remember:  
                  goodness is stronger than evil;  
                  love is stronger than hate;  
                  light is stronger than darkness;  
                  life is stronger than death.  
                  Victory is ours through Christ who loves us.  
                  Our service has ended.  
                  Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
                  **In the name of Christ**

---

**Liturgist/Study Leader:** Rev'd Dr. Geoff Dornan

**Music Coordinator:** Jade McFaul

**Reader:** Sonia di Mezza