

Bulletin for Sunday 11th July 2021

Good Morning, Friends.

**** **Please see the end of this Bulletin for a couple of important notices.**

Let's pause as we prepare to worship..... and then praise God as we sing:

Hymn: Fill thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise (R&S 406)

Prayer: God of glory and God of love,
we praise you for the wonders of your creation:
the heavens and the earth and all we see around us...
We praise you that you care for each one of us:
you know us, you understand us, you listen to us...
as we come to worship you, speak to our hearts.
We ask your blessing on everything we do,
and everything we give in your service,
now and always.
We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Mark chapter 6 verses 14-29

Reflection: This passage draws close parallels between John the Baptist and Jesus. Just as John had been the fore-runner for Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, so here his imprisonment and death foreshadows Christ's. Herod linked the two of them in his mind to such an extent that he thought Jesus might be John raised from the dead.

Herod had a guilty conscience. His attitude to John was ambivalent - apparently interested in John's preaching, despite holding him in prison. Unfortunately there was nothing ambivalent about his wife's hatred - John's disapproval of her marriage threatened her situation, and perhaps even her safety. Herod was a weak ruler, and easily manipulated because of his fear of what people would think of him; and although Herodias' daughter has been portrayed as a knowing temptress, it is more likely that she was a young person being used by her mother. So, a story of fear, manipulation and abuse, which culminated in the death of a good man.

We sometimes hear the phrase 'speaking truth to power', and surely that was what John did. Never easy, it can look like self-righteousness - in which case it won't be heard - or it can lead to retribution, as here. But it is what God calls prophets to do, isn't it? Surely there are some things which really need saying, albeit with humility and love.

Hymn: God of freedom, God of justice (R&S 625)

Prayer: God of love and freedom, hope and joy,

we pray for all those who long to be free:
for those wrongly imprisoned;
for those imprisoned because of a fight for justice,
or because they have a faith that is censored.
We pray for those who are condemned by poverty
and for those whose hunger feels like prison.
God who loves freely, we pray for all those we love...
Compassionate God, hear all our prayers,
spoken and unspoken,
in Jesus 'name Amen

Hymn: The kingdom of God is justice and joy (R&S 200)

Blessing: May we be guided so that
what we say and do builds up God's kingdom;
and may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us and with all those we love
now and always. Amen

The URCs General Assembly, of which I'm a member, is currently meeting (until Monday evening). More details are on the website, and Assembly can be followed live on the URC's website, Facebook page and YouTube channel, including Sunday worship at 11am (the order of service is on website).

As the government moves towards reducing Coronavirus restrictions, the URC's Synod Moderators have produced some updated advice, looking at the responsibility of our Elders to create safe spaces for everybody using our buildings. It contains useful reflections for us all, and can be found at: <https://urc.org.uk/coronavirus.html#latest-updates> - just look on that page for "New Freedoms, Same Responsibilities".

For now, morning worship is at 10.30am. Please remember masks and social distancing; congregational singing still isn't allowed.

The evening 'Sunday at Six' service, with hymns, is on Zoom at 6pm.

And the best chances to chat are at the 11.30am 'After Church Coffee' Zooms!

Anne Lewitt