

**The Rev. Faith Bledsoe
July 12, 2009
Proper 10
Mark 6:14-29**

Herod is remembering a moment of truth. That's where we enter the gospel story today. He's heard that some are claiming that the itinerant preacher, Jesus, is John the Baptist, returned from the dead. And Herod is remembering the day John died. It was a day of celebration, a feast in honor of Herod's own birthday. John was in chains in the dungeon for daring to criticize Herod's marriage to Herodias, Herod's brother's wife. Herod knew of John and was even intrigued by his words and teaching and believed him to be a holy man. Yet, at his wife's vengeful urging Herod had John arrested.

And on the day in question, Herod's daughter offers a dance to the court in celebration of her father's birthday, a dance so lovely that she delights her father who promises her anything she desires. Not really a wise move for any father, or ruler, for that matter, but a promise made in the heat of the moment, as we are all wont to do now and again. The daughter gleans advice from her mother and comes with the request of John's head on a platter and there it is: a moment of truth for the Greek ruler.

Will he uphold his promise, keep his word, maintain relationship with his wife and daughter and hold the respect of his court or will he pursue the questions of his heart that rise when the Baptist speaks? Now, we might say that of course we know the right answer – the first option kills a man and denies the voice of God. And yet, we are looking back with the knowledge of hindsight and for Herod, in that moment, and I think for us in particular moments of our lives, the answer is not so easy. It is too simple, I think, to paint these macabre characters with black and white hats and one choice good, the other bad. The most difficult choices of this life are not between the good and the bad, the black and the white. They occur in shades of gray, between two or more similarly strong choices.

Do I hold to my marriage vows and maintain family relationships or do I seek new life outside of an abusive relationship and risk being ostracized by my own family who do not believe in divorce? Do I engage a last chance cancer treatment with a 50% chance of recovery and a 50% chance of severe organ damage if I do recover, or do I live out the rest of my days letting cancer take its course, enjoying friends and family as I am able? Do I spend my savings and go back to school with the hope of living more deeply into my vocation, but without promise of employment or do I continue in a secure job I enjoy and am good at that serves the world well with my gifts and contributes to the support of the family?

It's not so easy, is it? We all have these moments of truth in our lives, forks in the road, when we decide one thing over another. And, in some instances, we don't even realize the significance of the moment until much later. After a childhood in the Episcopal church and later much searching across faiths and churches, I made a decision in college to be confirmed in the Episcopal Church. It was a moment of truth for me, a decision of good over good, although I didn't realize at the time how deep the significance of that choice would be. A different choice and perhaps I would be a Jewish rabbi now!

The General Convention of The Episcopal Church is in their fourth day of meeting today out in Anaheim, CA. As I've prayed for those gathered; read the blogs, the news stories, the Facebook reflections; and listened to the sermons and the stories spoken on the

live and recorded feeds, what has become clear is that the convention is making decisions in all realms that seek to hold in tension such things as justice, unity, economics, relationships, mission, truth, transparency, love, theology, tradition, peace, and so many other things. Certainly, there are decisions that are clear-cut with limited ramifications. But the larger questions -- questions of liturgy that honor saints of the church (and who are they?); questions of economic justice for lay employees of churches and who receives pension monies and health insurance; questions of ministry that support the Millennium Development Goals and how to fund such ministry; questions of hospitality, justice, mission and ministry with, for, to and from those other than the majority -- in other words, those who are not white, middle-upper class, educated heterosexual beings -- questions such as these fall into areas of gray and ramifications of decisions are far-reaching as justice, unity, economics, relationships, mission, truth, transparency, love, theology, tradition and peace seemingly go crashing into one another. This is not easy work and yet, God has never promised the way would be easy, only that God would be present on the way.

And so, what to do? How do we make our way through the gray, through the values, principles, facts and beliefs that can, on occasion, rub against one another? Well, first of all, we have one up on Herod. We trust God to be present; to be present in our wondering, our searching, our discerning and our deciding. We seek wisdom and discernment through prayer; through study of God's word in scripture and tradition; through conversation and council with those around us -- not simply those who might agree with us, but those with the gift of discernment. We gather the pertinent facts. We pray for discernment, wisdom and clarity.

And we listen. We listen for the voice of God in our neighbor, in our prayers, and in our own hearts. And, in the end, we make the best decision we can in the moment and trust in God's blessing. And beyond that moment, we continue in the disciplines of the faith -- the practices of community, prayer, study, witness, service and justice. That is my prayer for you as come to your own moments of truth and it is my prayer for those attending the General Convention of The Episcopal Church in Anaheim. I bless God for them and for their work. And as they are not separate from us, but are us and we them, I bless God for you and your work. And I bless God for the moments of truth in our lives, for in them lies the opening for hope, truth, love and grace to abound even more.