**MARK 6:14-29**

**THE TALE OF TWO KINGS**

 When “King Herod hear of it”. The IT about which Herod heard is likely the ministry of Jesus and the twelve disciples. Just before our reading, in last week’s reading, Jesus had been teaching among the villages and performing miracles, and then He sent out the twelve two by two to also teach and perform miracles. And in next week’s Gospel you’ll hear about the return of the twelve who are now no longer referred to as disciples, but as Apostles.

 This is what Herod is hearing about, and some are saying that John the Baptist has been raised from the dead for all of this IT to be going on. That tells us that the account of the execution of John that we hear about next has already happened.

A lot is going on in this reading, and a lot only just slightly referred to – too much to deal with in one sermon. So, I’ll be focusing in on the King. Actually, there are two kings in our reading: King Herod, and King Jesus. One a real King, and one a pretend king.

Rome never conferred the title of king on Herod, but Mark called Herod king five times in our reading. The only other individual who is referred to as King by Mark, is Jesus, in chapter fifteen. Pilate refers to Jesus as “King of the Jews” four times. The Roman soldiers hail Jesus as “King of the Jews” in mockery. The scoffers at the foot of the cross taunt Jesus by calling Him the “King of Israel”. Our reading today is in a sense a contrast between a fake king, and a real King.

The question of our reading from the start is ‘Who is Jesus?’ Is He John the Baptist raised from the dead? How would that work? I don’t know. What I do know is that Jesus isn’t John. Is He Elijah, or a prophet? No, He is neither of those either.

When you hear these speculations as to who Jesus is with authority to teach and power to do miracles does something else from the Scriptures come to mind – something from later on in the Gospels – (Mark 8:27-31)?

Jesus “asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told Him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." And He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered Him, "You are the Christ." And He strictly charged them to tell no one about Him. And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

Christ, Son of Man, King – or John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Who is Jesus? John the Baptist does play a role here as his death foreshadows Jesus’ death, which we just heard Him foretell, but Jesus isn’t John reincarnated. The Bible says it is appointed for us to die once (Hebrews 9:27). So, no one is reincarnated to die again and again, not even John, but people are resurrected to never die again, because Jesus rose from the dead after three days in the tomb.

Are you starting to see the contrast in this reading, between what people think is true, or would like to be true, and what is actually true. Herod was never a king, no matter how many times people referred to him as king or how much he tired to live like a king. And yet Jesus who didn’t live as a king, but rather lived humbly was true King, even though He was only referred to as a King at the time of His death, and He had His title affixed above His head on the cross – “King of the Jews”.

Set before us in this reading are two kings and two kingdoms. Herod, a worldly ruler who lives in opposition to the reign of God. Jesus, the true King, who brings the reign of God near to us. And we’re called to discern between the two, to reject the paths of the kingdoms of this age, and follow our true King Jesus under the reign of God, no matter how much opposition we may face from the fake kings of this world.

In our country we’re not likely to be imprisoned or beheaded for our faith, but we may face some sort of persecution. At the Arts Festival in Regina that I attended earlier this year there was a lot of things that would make a Christian’s skin crawl, if they thought about it and took their faith seriously. So, I was pleasantly surprized to see one Gospel singer set up among all the other musicians and attractions. Yet as I listened to this man who had no crowd gathered about him, but only a small group of people, with everyone else walking by, one passerby yelled something in my ear.

I was shocked. It was like a drive by shooting as the man kept on walking. I wasn’t offended or hurt, but rather stunned. I’ve never had anyone attack me because of my faith. But there it was right on the streets of Regina. In the larger scheme of things compared to an imprisonment or beheading what I experienced was nothing. Yet, as our culture is rapidly changing and turning away from King Jesus to the false kings of this world the next time anyone of us experiences anything it may not be nothing as we’re constantly being pressured to bow to the false kings of this world – LGBTQ to euthanasia – the pressure is out there, and it may find you one day.

And thus it becomes even more important to ground ourselves in our faith in King Jesus. Who is Jesus? Why do we believe what we believe? Or even more pointedly, ‘What do you believe?’

Jesus rules with certainty. Jesus knows why He has come, what He is doing, and He doesn’t need to gather powerful people around Him to stay on top. Jesus gathers the suffering, the wounded and the lost, and He rules with eternity in view. He offers His life to be poured out for the love of God on all nations for the forgiveness of all sins, for those who persecute Christians, and for those who fall prey to the pressures of the LGBTQ ideology, or the culture of death that tells people that when they’re old, disabled or in pain they’re a drain on the medical system and the better choice is to just end your life. Die! Relieve your family of the burden of having to watch you suffer. And yes, I’ve heard doctors and nurses talk that way. Euthanasia is not a good death as they call it, but rather it is murder and suicide.

Do you think that John prayed to die as He languished in prison and welcomed death? “Well, finally they’re going to behead me and end my suffering with compassion.” Even Jesus prayed that the cup of suffering on the cross would pass from Him. Yet, knowing what would come of it Jesus drank the cup of sorrow and suffering for us so that we can be spared an eternity of sorrow and suffering.

 Who is this Jesus whom Herod is hearing about? Jesus lived a perfect life in obedience to the whole will and law of God His Father, our Father. Jesus lived humbly, not in splendor as Herod did. Most of us have more than we need in things, and not enough of what we need in Jesus.

 Yet, still Jesus associated with us sinners and outcasts. He was moved by compassion for us sinners. If you don’t take sin that seriously you might find it easy to associate with sinners. I find it hard at times, knowing that their lifestyle is against God’s will. I don’t want to support their sin, but I don’t want to condemn them either. It can be a struggle for Christians. For Jesus that is who He is, our compassionate King and God.

 Jesus submitted to the will of God His Father, enduring the scorn of those who mocked Him as King and humiliated Him by nailing Him naked to a cross, and yet in irony placing the plaque of “King of the Jews” above His head.

 I didn’t make a scene when I was verbally assaulted in Regina, running after the man, or running to the media with any cellphone footage that someone might have captured. I was more puzzled, and accepted that it happened, and moved on. How might you react if you’re attacked for your faith. First think of how Jesus reacted. Think of what Jesus said, “I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39), “and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either” (Luke 6:29).

 Think of what IT you have heard about Jesus, and if He is a curiosity to you, someone to be afraid of, or your SAVIOUR KING? Amen.