

Sunday 11th July 2021

Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Today's Gospel reading: Mark 6: 14-29

Listen to the Gospel of Christ according to Saint Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

King Herod heard of the healings and other miracles, 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.' But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'

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

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

If you're a fan of "Horrible Histories", you might be familiar with some of the gory goings-on in the past, but we don't usually expect such a "Ghastly Gospel"!

We do get some pretty bloodthirsty episodes in the Old Testament. That's the part of the Bible which tells us about the time before Jesus, when people were struggling to learn about God and often misunderstood the nature of his love. When it comes to the four gospels, which tell the story of Jesus, and from which our weekly gospel reading is taken, we expect to hear about Jesus's teaching, his stories, his healings – things which leave us feeling good.

Today's story, however, is one which even adults find difficult and wonder what can be learned from it. It might be easier to skip over an episode like this, but it is important not to, because John the Baptist played a vital part in the story of Jesus, and also because every single story in the gospels has something important to teach us - even if it is difficult.

This one, for example, can help us to think about the responsibility we all have for our words and actions, about the making and keeping of promises - and when maybe it is better to break a promise than to go for the alternative! This sad story of Herod and his family has much to say about power and the abuse of power. So let's think about this "Ghastly Gospel" in more detail.

The Herod in question here is Herod Antipas – a nasty piece of work! He followed on from his father, Herod "the Great" (or not so great, considering that he was the king Herod at the Jesus's birth, from whom the Holy Family had to flee to Egypt). Herod Antipas had divorced his wife to hook up with his brother's wife and this story involves her and her young daughter, who was obviously a brilliant dancer! At least, Herod thought so, and we have heard what happened as a result.

🤔 Some things to think about:

Have you ever been asked to do something, or to go along with something, that you knew, deep inside, was wrong? Sometimes we get into trouble for doing things that we know in our hearts are wrong, but it's hard to say "no" when our friends are doing them, isn't it? Have you ever heard yourself saying to your parents, "but everyone else was doing it"?

This story helps us to remember that the choices we make are our own and we have to take personal responsibility. The girl in the story didn't know what to ask for when Herod offered her whatever she wanted, so she asked her mother. Do you think she should have gone along with what her mother told her to ask for, when it involved killing a man?

Because Herod had made a promise to the girl in front of all his friends and many important people, when she asked for something so terrible, he didn't want to lose face and felt he had to go along with it. Do you think this was a promise he should have kept? What do you think you would have told her? Would it have been better to break his promise rather than do such an awful thing?

Thankfully, we are rarely faced with the sort of decisions that were made in this story, but it is a reminder to each of us that, if we are asked to make choices that we just know would be wrong, it is so important to have the strength and the courage to say no - even when taking responsibility is a hard thing to do.

So next time you're asked, will you do a better job than Herod and remember that you're responsible for the things you do? The wonderful thing for us is that, whenever we are faced with difficult decisions, we have a helper - God's Holy Spirit. If we ask, God will help us to know what is right and which decision we should make - but we need to listen!

Here's a prayer for this week:

Dear God, Sometimes we are faced with such hard choices. Fill us with your Holy Spirit and give us the wisdom and strength we need to live our lives in a way that pleases you. Amen.

A bit of light relief is called for now! Below are some less ghastly puzzles and colourings!

Herod was intrigued by stories he heard about the miracles Jesus was doing – like this!

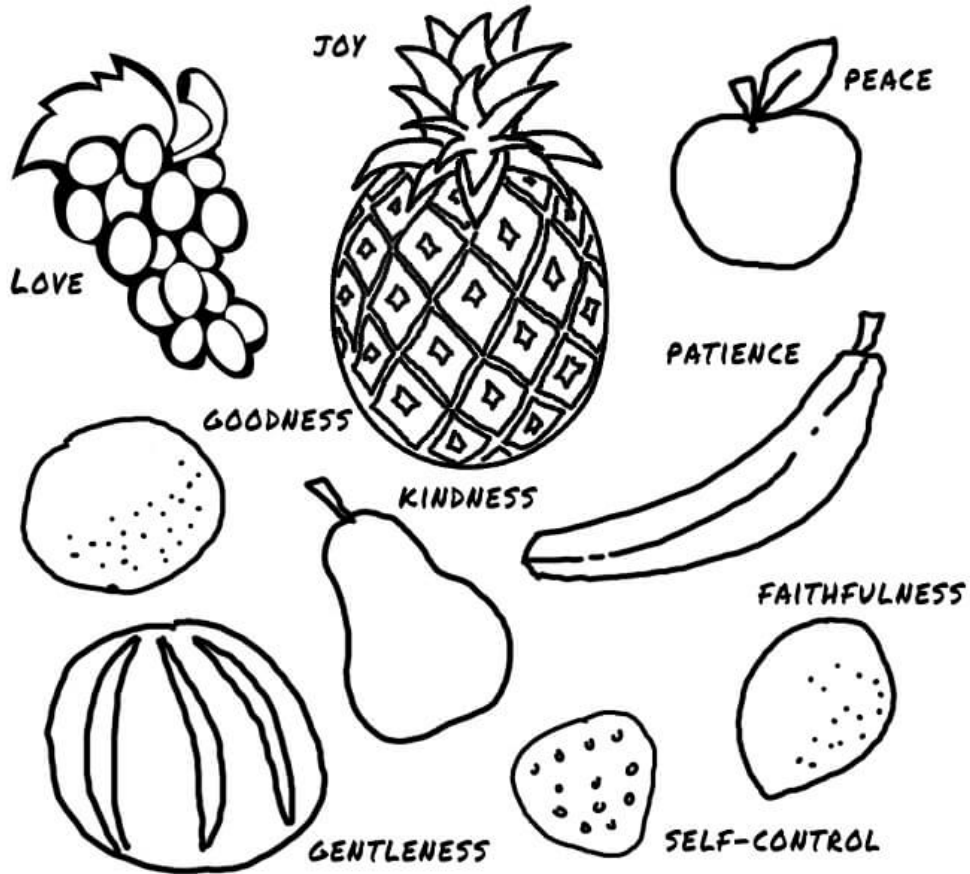
Hidden Pictures: Jesus Healed a Blind Man

Find these objects hidden in the picture below: book, crown, fish, jug, moon, necktie, needle and thread, snail, sock, star.

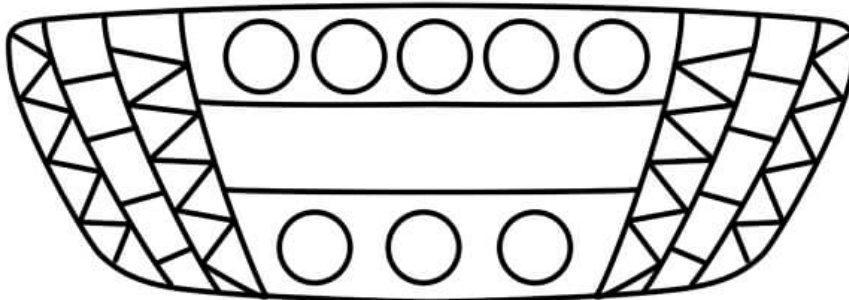


When we follow Jesus, we have his spirit with us to help us, with all the fruit that the spirit brings!

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT



WRITE YOUR NAME ON THE BOWL



Can you make this one a picture of you?

God Cares About You!



"Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered"
(Matthew 10:30, NIV)



Remember....



I can do
all things
through
Christ who
strengthens
me

Philippians 4:13

