



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – 8th Sunday in Pentecost – July 15, 2018, Heads on Platters

Herod made a promise to his wife's daughter, and he had the head of John the Baptist brought to her on a platter.

But Herod had a conscience. He knew he shouldn't have given in and taken that human life. He fell short. And John the Baptist died.

Herod faces conflict. He's working his way through a lot of complicated problems within his family, within his household and with those around him. And pretty soon he figures out that it's impossible to please everyone and make them happy. No matter what he does, somebody's going to be upset. He can't make everyone happy at the same time. That's impossible. That's life.

As Karen Marie Yust points out, "Herod [sic] is caught in a web of relationships that seem to render him a "reactor" rather than an "actor" in the drama of life."

Herod reacts. He gives in. It happens over and over in the Bible. People know what they should do, but they react and make unfortunate choices. Judas betrays Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Pilate releases Barabbas and condemns Jesus to die on the cross. Peter denies Jesus three times. It happens in the Bible and it happens in life.

Life.

As many of you know, I returned from Austin yesterday where I spent two weeks engaged in the work of the broader church at our General Convention.

And there was a lot of political maneuvering going on. That's life in the church. We debated and debated possible revisions to the Book of Common Prayer, the role of bishops, experimental rites for marriage equality, socially responsible investment in Israel and Palestine, and the list went on and on.

But the thing that really stuck with me about the whole thing are the words of the Presiding Bishop during the opening Eucharist where he quoted Verna Dozier who asked one simple question: Do you want to *follow* Jesus, or are you content just to worship him?

Do you want to *follow* Jesus, or are you content just to worship him?

Those words really hit me. About a week before I left for Texas, I was at a Wednesday morning Eucharist here in the Cathedral and I told the handful of people who were there about going to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and standing about 15 feet from the tomb where they placed the body of Jesus, only to discover that I was in the garden. I was in the garden where Mary Magdalene was standing and I felt what it must've felt like to realize that Jesus was standing before me and my looking at him and crying out, "Rabbouni! Teacher!"

From that moment, I took that belief into my heart and I affirm that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is historical fact. He rose from the dead—for you, for me, for the church, for the world, for my friends, for my enemies, for those I'm called to forgive—Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And do I want to *follow* him, or am I content just to worship him?

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I try to imagine Jesus Christ looking down on the world and tuning into spots of spiritual energy, spiritual energy coming from places like Austin, where thousands of Episcopalians were gathered to serve his cause. I try to imagine him looking down to see whether we as the church are following him and I found myself asking different, but similar questions:

- Are we following him, or are we handing him heads on platters?
- Are we actors or are we *reactors* in the drama of life?
- Are we country club parishioners or are we disciples in the church of Jesus?

Do we want to follow, or are we content just to worship?

I don't know what the answer is for you. I can only tell you what was going on for me.

During much of the debate on important things like prayer book revision, the role of bishops, socially responsible investment, and the like, I found myself getting self-righteous and succumbing to my ego. And when I get like that, I know that I'm probably in a win/lose situation and that someone's head is probably gonna end up on a platter – maybe not literally, but definitely figuratively, definitely spiritually; because it seems like someone else has to be squashed in order for my perspective to prevail. Or more likely than not, it'll be my head that ends up on a platter.

But then I have to ask myself, "Is that the world that Jesus Christ envisioned when he resurrected himself back into it in that garden in the Holy Land?"

And am I looking at the resurrected Christ in my midst and saying *I will follow you, Lord*; or am I handing him heads on platters?

What about you? In the words of the Presiding Bishop in a sermon at the Hutto Detention Center:

- Are you good?
- Are you kind?
- Are you just?
- Are you loving?

Are you doling out heads on platters, or are you a follower of Jesus?

I had an opportunity to live into the call to follow many times in Austin. When about 30 feet away from me the family of Carmen Schentrup who'd been shot and killed at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School shed tears as they addressed the crowd, I looked into the faces of the Christ I long to worship *and* follow. When I stood outside that detention center in Taylor, Texas and thought about how behind the walls and fences there were mothers in cages who had been separated from their children at the border, I looked beyond the fences and walls and into the faces of the Christ I long to worship *and* follow. When I heard testimony from the Archbishop of South Africa and then from a Native American woman from Alaska who talked about how water and food supplies in their homelands are dwindling due to climate change, I looked into the faces of the Christ I long to worship *and* follow.

And now I'm home with all of you, the people I love and the cathedral I love; and I look at who we are, what we do, and what we offer up to the God whose Son we gather together to worship *and* follow.

In the midst of finances, staffing shortages, deferred maintenance on our buildings, biting remarks about me and other leaders; I ask you, are we putting heads on platters or are we looking into the face of Jesus and saying, *I will worship **and** follow*?

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And on the flipside, when people are in the Manger putting hygiene items and nonperishable foods into bags to give out to people on the streets, when people are striving to do what they can to make sure that others less fortunate have homes to live in, when people come in to do what needs to be done to get ready for worship and then work tirelessly to make sure we have an aloha hour (sometimes including even cleaning bathrooms and toilets), when people lend their voices through music to lift our hearts up in prayers to God, or when people reach out to others who lack food and shelter and give them a place to sit in our pews, I truly believe we are looking into the face of Jesus and saying *I will worship **and** follow.*

That's where the rubber hits the road for us as disciples; not as country club parishioners, but as followers, as disciples of Jesus. And in the words of the Presiding Bishop who quoted Verna Dozier I ask you one more time: Do you want to follow Jesus, or are you content just to worship him?.

And I ask again: are we putting heads on platters or are we looking into the face of Jesus and saying *I will worship **and** follow?*

My prayer for you, my prayer for me, my prayer for St. Andrew's Cathedral, my prayer for the Diocese of Hawai'i, my prayer for the Episcopal Church, my prayer for the country, and my prayer for the world is that we all settle not just for the latter, but to do both; to worship so that we *can* follow.

And I ask your prayers to help me meet that end as well and may we offer that promise up to God and to the face of Christ.

*I will worship **and** I will follow.*

Amen.