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## *Teach Me To Dance*

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder  
Proper 10 – Year B**

Did anybody listen to this morning's Gospel and wonder, where's the "Good News" in that? When we read today's Gospel at our staff meeting earlier this week, one person noted that it can be hard or strange to utter the words "Thanks be to God!" at the end of certain Gospel lessons if you're paying attention. This would certainly be one of those instances.

What exactly is this passage supposed to teach about God? About love? About following Jesus? About our call as Christians?

*Beware of birthday parties? What not to serve as the final course at dinner? Don't underestimate the influence of dancers?* I don't think so.

But I do think there's something to this reading—something we can take with us as we walk this path as followers of Jesus.

First, if you'll allow me a moment to geek out, notice how this Gospel begins. The story of John the Baptist's head being served on a platter is not happening in real-time. It's a flashback to answer the question—who is this Jesus? Mark's Gospel does this several times, these flashbacks, and we call it "intercalation" or "a Markan sandwich."

What's actually happening real-time is that Herod has heard about all the things that Jesus is doing and saying—casting out demons, healing people, sending out disciples to do the same... and he gets nervous. People are asking the question, who is this guy? Just like the Gospel two weeks ago when people asked, "Where did this man get all this power and wisdom? Is this not Mary's son?" It seems whenever people come upon the works of Jesus, they ask bewildered, who is this guy?

Indeed a couple chapters after this, Jesus will ask his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" and even then they'll respond with answers similar to Herod and friends: Oh, you know... some folk think you're John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others a prophet. But then Jesus will turn the question on them, asking, "But you... who do you say that I am?" And precious Peter will respond, "You are the Messiah."

So that's what I think this Gospel is all about. It's about answering the question, again and again and again, who is Jesus? Who is Jesus in our Holy Scriptures, who is Jesus in the history of the world, who is Jesus to YOU?

I used to be part of a "prayer and praise" team in college, leading the contemporary worship service on campus. We would often sing a song that's been playing in my head this week: *Who do you say that I am? Who do you say is the Son of man? Do people see your love for me? Who do you say that I am.* I tried googling this song and found no trace of it on the internet, but it's engrained in my memory regardless.

So let's take a look at what the various characters in today's stories tell us about who Jesus is—God with us.

Consider John, Jesus' cousin, born just months before him, telling the world: prepare the way of the Lord! Even in utero, John leapt at the presence of Jesus. His whole life was dedicated to breaking open the world to make room for Christ's presence among us. He was paving the way for the kingdom of God, and I'm pretty sure he knew exactly what the risks were ushering in said kingdom.

And then consider Herod, who despite John insisting Herod's marriage was a sham, respected and protected John, and liked to hear what John had to say. Herod was fascinated! Perhaps drawn to the truth John spoke, perhaps drawn to the fact that John spoke this truth with such courage. Perhaps intrigued that John could be so comfortable in his own skin despite not fitting in at all.

Herod seems to have liked John enough to keep him close by—and alive. But he also seems to just dance on the edge of true conviction. He's intrigued, but not a convert. And so he is "deeply grieved" when his daughter asks him, in front of all his friends, for John's head on a platter. But not grieved enough to save the one person interested in saving him.

I read this story and I have to wonder... how many of us are like Herod? How many of us are merely intrigued by Jesus the same way Herod is intrigued by John. How many of us like to listen to Jesus, are perplexed by the things Jesus says, respect Jesus... until we get in an uncomfortable social situation that asks us to choose between loving others or loving ourselves. Between worshiping God or worshiping power. Between saving a life or saving face.

I ponder all of this in my heart while also reading our lesson from 2 Samuel, which is not meant to be a thematic partner to today's Gospel, but somehow I think it is. You see David, who is far-from-perfect, has just become king of Israel and decides to name Jerusalem the capitol. He then decides that if Jerusalem is to be the center of the kingdom, then God needs to be at the center of Jerusalem. So he brings the Ark of the Covenant, a wooden chest containing the tablets Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai, to Jerusalem.

God is clearly not contained in the box, but this box is the physical reminder of the Real Presence of God—just as the Holy Eucharist makes that presence real to us every week. So first, David has decided to relocate the Ark to make a statement: God is with us. God's presence is here and it is real. Pay attention.

But then David decides to dance... and not just a little modest jig on the way to Jerusalem, no. David dances *with all his might!* Imagine! He is not saving face. He is not on the fence. He is not skirting the question of who God is to him. David is all in. And publicly so.

I read this story and I have to wonder... how many of us are like David? How many of us love God with abandon. How many of us are comfortable enough in our own skin as children of God and as followers of Jesus to throw caution to the wind and live our faith loud and proud?

If I'm honest, I have both Herod and David moments. It might even be more accurate to say I have seasons of Herod's trepidation and seasons of David's audaciousness. Right now I'm probably somewhere between the two—I've got some bruises from sticking my neck out like John, and while my head is still on, it does make me think twice about living out my faith as boldly as I might like.

But my prayer is that we'll all dance before God... not dance around God, dodging the question of who God is to us... but dance before God with boldness and joy!

My prayer is that we will announce to the world, "God is present in this place! The real God! The living God! God is with us!" and that our dancing will grant us the courage we need to stand up for God and God's children and God's creation, following the example of John—who lost his head, and Jesus—who lost his life, but saved the world! But saved a wretch like me, a Herod like me, a David like me—but saved me, and saved you. God saves us still.

I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief. Teach me to dance. Amen, amen, amen.