

2 Samuel 6:1-19

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:14-29

I couldn't decide if this were more of a “grumpy woman Sunday” or a “don't mess with a woman Sunday.” Maybe just “Don't mess with a grumpy woman” Sunday. Of course, the women in our readings today are very different. Michal was the daughter of King Saul. Saul gave her to David in marriage with the explicit hope that he would be so distracted by her that he would fall prey to the Philistines in battle. What Saul didn't count on was that Michal truly loved David. In fact, she has the distinction of being the only woman in the Bible whom we are told loves her husband. Doesn't mean the others necessarily didn't love their husbands, but Michal's love is the only one the Bible deems worthy enough of mention.

And then there is Herodias. I'm still trying to wrap my head around the family connections in the Herod family. Their family tree is more of a briar patch: everything twisted up around everything else and no matter where you put your hand, you're going to find trouble. Herod the Great – the Herod of the Christmas stories – was Herodias' mother's uncle by way of Herod's sister, Salome. She married two of Herod the Great's sons, each from a different wife, making her both daughter-in-law and great niece to Herod the Great. Like I said, the Herodian family tree did not tend to fork much.

At any rate, John the Baptizer spoke out against her marrying her ex-husband's brother. She had divorced Herod II when he was demoted to second in line for the throne. Since his half-brother, Herod Antipas, got moved up, she decided to trade in her old husband for a newer model. Now if Herod II, her first husband, had died without an heir, Herod Antipas, whom Mark inexplicably calls “Phillip,” Herod's half-brother, would have been required to marry her and produce an heir, at least according to Levirate Law. But since she divorced him to switch to the brother that was next in line to the throne, John didn't like her marriage.

Unsurprisingly, Herodias did not take kindly to John's calling her a harlot and an adulteress in public, so she wanted John disposed of. Unfortunately, her second husband, Herod Antipas – the one Mark calls Phillip for reasons known only to him – liked to listen to John preach. Presumably for the same reason that I listen to Jimmy Swaggert radio – to see what the other side says in order to reaffirm my own beliefs. So John languished in Jerusalem Central Lock-Up, waiting for Herod to make up his mind.

Enter Salome and her Dance of the Seven Veils. Actually, you might have noticed that the Bible doesn't call it that. Oscar Wilde did, but I digress. Salome, whom Mark calls Herodias for some reason – the guy was no good with names – dances for her uncle/step-father and his guests with such skill that he is enthralled and rashly promises her up to half his kingdom. This is the same deal that King Xerxes – or king Ahasueras depending upon which translation you use – offered to Esther in the

Old Testament book of, for once, the same name.

Michal, on the other hand, is presented not as trying to get her own way, but as one who, on the surface at least, is trying to maintain the dignity of Israel's relatively new monarchy. Her father Saul had been the first ever king of Israel, and her husband, David, was still trying to establish his *bona fides*. That is why David is moving the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. It would bring together the civic and cultic life of the nation. Having the ark and the king in the city of David would make David the undisputed ruler of the nation. No wonder he was so excited as the ark made its way into Jerusalem; dancing around with all manner of things flying in the breeze, to the point where his wife thought he was more interested in impressing the household maids than the nation as a whole.

So we have two strong women. One uses her influence to get her revenge; the other, to try to control her husband's excesses. Our reading today has been edited in such a way that Michal comes across as a bit of a shrew. As we talked about in Sunday school, though, there is a lot more to her story than we get in the Lectionary. I encourage you to read 2 Samuel yourselves to get the rest of her story. In the meantime, we are presented with two contrasts, two ways to exercise power and control. One woman seeks her own desires while the other is thinking about the nation as a whole. How do we exercise our authority, our freedoms?

There is a lot of talk these days about folks feeling like they are losing control. So much has changed in the last couple of weeks, what with flags and the Supreme Court and all, it is no wonder that folks are anxious and confused. What does all of this mean? What is going to happen? Where will it end? One thing is certain, change will never end. The only constant is change after all. We are not going to keep change from happening. What we can do is control how we respond to change. That's an important idea – responding as opposed to reacting. We need to be able to respond to the world, not merely react.

We are called by our Lord Christ to transform the world. God, working through us, seeks to make his heavenly kingdom a reality for all of his children. We are destined, as St. Paul reminds us, to be God's children through adoption in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are heirs of the heavenly kingdom. While we seek to transform this world, this is not our home. We are destined for greater things. Then why fool with this world? Why try to make it a better place? Can you imagine the presence of Jesus Christ not making things better? Our Lord never sought to control the world; he wanted to save it. Our task is not control, but transformation. We are here to serve, not to be served, just like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.” We live for the praise of God's glory, not our own. God is glorified not in controlling, but in being in relationship. However

we choose to respond to vagaries of this world, as Christians, our response must be based on love and compassion, building up and growing together. That is the mark of a truly Christian response.

So as we choose how to respond to the world, no matter what the change is, we must ask ourselves, "Is what I am doing and saying a manifestation of God's love and God's grace? Or am I seeking my own satisfaction?" Are my wants and desires more important than the good of others? Am I responding in love and compassion? Or reacting in fear and anxiety? Our calling is clear. How we live out that calling is the work of our lifetimes. It is not always easy to know what we are to do, but we always know in what spirit we should do it. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*