

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for Sunday 11th July

Creator God,
you made us all in your image:
may we discern you in all that we see,
and serve you in all that we do;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 11th July

A reading from Amos 7:7-15

This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said,

"See, I am setting a plumb line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." Then Amaziah, the
priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against
you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words.
For thus Amos has said,
'Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'"

And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your
bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the
king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a
herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees. and the LORD took me from following
the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

A Gospel reading from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 6:14-29

King Herod heard of it, 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

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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.

A reflection from Ruth Bond, member of the Lordsbridge Team Chapter

We have something of a ghastly and grizzly subject for a summer Sunday morning. A murder, a beheading, in fact.

Now I'm the first to admit that I do like a good murder, in the murder mystery sense, either police finding the murderer, but we already know who it is or neither reader nor police knowing who did it or why. I was brought up on Agatha Christie and Cluedo, so was it Colonel Mustard or Major Plum who murdered the victim in the library with the candlestick?

That of course is all a lighthearted introduction to a major and horrific murder where we know the victim and the perpetrator. Herod might not have actually wielded the weapon, but he was a huge accessory after the fact – no, more than that, he ordered the murder of John the Baptist.

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But before getting embroiled in a whodunit and why, before getting agitated about a murder let's take a step back. The telling of the beheading of John the Baptist is told as a backstory to Herod Antipas' agitation, Herod's trembling at the fact of what he did, because he had heard reports of this Jesus of Nazareth

and his followers; they were casting out demons, anointing numerous people who were sick and curing them, what's more they were proclaiming that, everyone, should repent. And you know, people were listening to Jesus, He had power. He had authority. News about this man was like a live fuse moving through the land igniting everything, no, everyone, in his path. And King Herod was very fearful.

On top of all that, the word was out that people had to repent. Stop doing what you've been doing, in Herod's case killing at will, and live a blameless life. Herod's thought, clearly, was, 'can't do that, can't lose face.' And that is precisely why John was beheaded in the first place, Herod couldn't lose face in front of his friends, the men in high places, or his wife, when he had promised his step daughter anything, absolutely anything because she danced for the guests at his birthday party.

There can be no doubt that the atmosphere of the party changed in an instant – a young girl carries in a great platter and upon it is – how did she carry it, never mind how could she? Talk about "I went to a marvellous party"!

But then, it wasn't Herod who wanted John dead, he quite liked the man, and he enjoyed listening to him. He only put him in prison to shut him up, to stop him going on and on about Herod's second marriage, even though nothing could make John change his mind and say anything different. John wasn't cowed and he wouldn't deny the truth, even if it meant dying. Yes, Herod did quite like John. Not his fault, it was his wife, Herodias, who was the snake in the grass? Was it? She was the one who took against John when he said her marriage to Herod was unlawful having discarded his brother for the brother-in-law and read her the riot act on fidelity and not going against the law. But no, Herod, you can't wriggle out of this one.

As you might imagine Jesus got to know of his cousin's horrendous death.

In his way John was Jesus' mentor; he proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God, the then modern day equivalent of the prophets of the Old Testament who confronted kings about immorality; unfortunately, like some of them, he was not very successful when he confronted Herod. But the prophets were called by God not to be successful but to preach the word of God, no matter how it was received and no matter what became of them. John was born just before Jesus, John preached the

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word of God and very soon Jesus, telling with even more certainty of the coming Kingdom, was also put to death.

The kingdom that John preached about was to be very different, of course, from the Kingdom of Herod Antipas. At the time of Jesus' crucifixion the shout went up, "We have no King but Caesar, We have no King but Caesar ". The fickleness of the mass, the sway of the negative. Oh how this continues today and has done down the ages.

Repent shouted John the Baptist – think outside your life box, don't accept and expect things to always be the same, imagine what might be. Repent – do justice, love mercy be compassionate. In the Kingdom of God live as in the body of the Lord.

The Palestine of Caesar's rule was a dictatorship; for the nation to be secure and stable there had to be rules and regulations. All for everyone's own good they were told. But John the Baptist kicked against all of this, he preached the opposite, telling the people that none of it was for their own good at all, but only for the good of Caesar. There is another way to live he told them and I bet you know, deep down, that how you live now is not the best way, not the right way. The right way is God's way, not Caesar's way.

No doubt Jesus was distraught when he heard the news of John's death. The way was now open for his death to follow but for all that, the glorious kingdom did not die with John for Jesus was the embodiment of that Kingdom and he knew and we know that nothing in the world can stop it.

Jesus continued where John had stopped, he continued to spread the good news, he cast out demons, he quietened hearts, dispelled fears, healed the sick and explained in parables what he was here for. Not all understood him, very few understood, even those who were with him constantly, but Jesus touched people, both literally and figuratively. He told that love is stronger than death and that we are eternally loved by His father. You must choose he told the people, your way or God's way.

John the Baptist knew his mission in life. He understood that he had been set apart by God for a purpose. His purpose was to prepare the way for Jesus. Through God's direction, John the Baptist challenged the people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah by turning away from sin and being baptised as a sign of repentance. Your way or God's way.

John's greatest strength was his commitment to the call of God on his life. He was bold and willing to die for his stand against sin.

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When we realize that God has given us a specific purpose for our lives, we can move forward with confidence, putting our trust in the One who called us.

The power that was in John was in Jesus. The power that was in Jesus is in us.

Let us keep Jesus alive in our lives; that way we too can make Herod quake in his sandals.