

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

July 11, 2021

Proper 10B/Ordinary 15B/Pentecost 8

The readings this week:

- 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19 ◦ Psalm 24
- Ephesians 1:3-14 ◦ Mark 6:14-29

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

The River of John

Here at the ending of John the Baptist's life, I find myself thinking back to its beginning. How the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah to tell him of the longed-for son who will bring joy and gladness. How the joyful John leaps in his mother's womb when the pregnant Mary comes to visit. How the neighbors rejoice at his birth. How, on the day of her son's circumcision, Elizabeth declares, "He is to be called John," to the befuddlement of those who assumed he would be named after his father. How Zechariah, struck mute months earlier when he had expressed his incredulity at Gabriel's news, reaches for a writing tablet and insists,

His name is John.

It is the name that had accompanied the angel's stunning news, the name that Gabriel had told Zechariah and Elizabeth to give to their son, the name destined for him. I imagine Zechariah writing it for his neighbors in large letters, scored heavy with emphasis. His wife was not mistaken in the name she gave.

His name is John.

John absorbs the insistent clarity that his parents display in their naming of him. Their strength of purpose passes into him, is borne in his blood, infuses everything that will follow. As he enters the scene as an adult, we see that the one who has been sent to prepare the way, the one who will be known as the Baptist, has himself become like a river whose course is directed not merely by its banks but by an underlying sureness of purpose. John the Waymaker does not waver from the course that is his call.

His name is John.

John had met Jesus when they were in the waters of the womb, had met him again at the waters of the Jordan, had been borne along by the sureness of his call and by the living water he found in his cousin the Christ. At the last, when we meet him in today's gospel reading, what flows in John's life is not water but blood, a horrendous libation spilled out at Herod's feast. I imagine that John goes to his death with the same clarity and steadfastness that marked his birth and his life. That perhaps he heard again the voices of the parents who named him. That before the felling stroke there came an echo of the song that his

father, no longer mute, had lifted on the day of John's naming:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1.76-80)

Death does not have the last word in John's story; blood is not the final legacy of the Baptizer. John had succeeded in making a way for the dawn that his father sang about at his birth. The one who "came as a witness to testify to the light" (John 1.7) had completed his purpose and his call, giving himself with complete abandon. "He himself was not the light," the Gospel of John points out, yet the Baptist shimmered with steadfast purpose and with the joy that had marked his life from the moment he met Jesus.

His name is John.

The life of John the Baptist was utterly intertwined with the life of Jesus. And yet something about his love of Christ and his singleness of purpose enabled him to remain so much himself. In the fierce and focused rhythm and flow of his living and his dying, the Baptizer beckons us to reckon with what it means to divest ourselves in the service of Christ without becoming diminished, without giving up the self that God created.

His name is John.

And what name is ours? What distinguishes and directs the flow and focus of our lives? What is the purpose we are known for—or that we struggle toward and long for? How do we abandon ourselves to this purpose and to the One who calls us to it, and move ever more deeply into the self that God created us to be?

~ Jan L. Richardson, [The Painted Prayerbook](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

What probably indicates right from the very beginning that something is not right? What is the most common characteristic about David which always seems to predict whether he's about to be a success or failure? How do we probably know for sure that David's heart was not right with the Lord in this matter? What did David obviously change? Why do you suppose Michal looked upon David's actions with contempt? What is David's gift-giving reflective of? What are examples in churches today where they conform to the ways of the world instead of adhering exclusively to God's pattern provided in His Word? *Walk with the Word*

Psalm Reading: Psalm 24

Why do you think David begins this psalm by talking about God as Creator? What aspects of God does His creation highlight? How does this make you feel about God? How does it make you feel about yourself? This psalm tells us "the earth and everything in it" is the Lord's. How do you treat things that "belong to you"? How does this change the way you see everything around you? Why might David make this observation before talking about holy living? What is holiness? What does a holy life look like? Who is someone that comes to mind when you think of holy living? What does it mean to seek God's face? How can you seek His face in your daily life? *Long Hollow Church*



Praying Toward Sunday

Father God,
teach us how to dance
to the rhythm of your wisdom;
show us how to laugh
with the insights of your truth,
so that we can live for the praise of your glory
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

~ *Worship@North*

The more a soul loves, the more perfect it is in its love; hence it follows that the soul which is already perfect is, if we may speak in this manner, all love. All its actions are love, all its energies and strength are occupied in love. It gives up all it has, like the wise merchant, for this treasure of love which it finds hidden in God.

The Beloved cares for nothing else but love. The soul, therefore, anxious to please him perfectly, occupies itself unceasingly in pure love of God.

As the bee draws honey from all plants and makes use of them only for that end, so the soul most easily draws the sweetness of love from all that happens to it. It makes all things subservient to the end of loving God, whether they are sweet or bitter.

In all its occupations its joy is the love of God.

~ John of the Cross 1542-1591, *The Spiritual Canticle*,
via Suzanne Guthrie, *At the Edge of Enclosure*

3rd Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14

1:3 begins with a call for God to be "Blessed." The word "Blessed" carries with it the idea of "speaking highly about another." According to what you see in 1:3 why would Christians be motivated to "speak highly" of God? What is the basis for the blessing of God? (In other words, "in whom" is the blessing of God found?) Paul lets us know that we are blessed with "every blessing." To the best of your understanding, what do you think it means to have "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"? In the Old Testament alone there are over 400 different statements of God blessing His people. We know the God who blesses. What is your current understanding of God's character? Do you think of God as a receiver who we must perform for, or as a giver who loves to bless us? *Pastor Mark Robinson*

4th Reading: Mark 6:14-29

There is speculation as to the identity of Jesus in verses 14-15. Who does Herod conclude Jesus to be? Why do you think Herod makes this conclusion (even though it seems to defy reason!)? In what ways do we see John the Baptist continuing his ministry of calling people to repentance? If you were in John's position, what fears might you have had in calling the king to repentance? How can you explain Herod being "greatly perplexed" but at the same time hearing John "gladly"? How might this describe some people's experience with the Christian faith? Why does Herod keep his oath (v. 26)? What does this tell us about Herod's heart? What possible idols does he have? How does this account of John the Baptist's death confront the myth that if we are faithful to God, our lives will be comfortable? John lived a life poured out in service to Jesus Christ. What is hindering you from living a life fully poured out for Christ? *Cornerstone*