



St Marylebone  
Parish Church

## Trinity 6 2021 11 am

*Mark 6.14-29*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

St John the Baptist, the Precursor of Jesus, the Forerunner – the Voice that cried out loudly in the wilderness: ‘prepare the way of the Lord!’, is the only saint whose birth *and* death, are celebrated in the Western Church’s calendar of saints. Indeed, the Orthodox Churches celebrates not just two, but five feast days associated with the Baptist.

Today, although not a feast day of John the Baptist, our gospel reading centres on his martyrdom at the hands of the Roman provincial tetrarch, Herod.

Throughout the Gospels, John’s role in relation to Jesus is made very clear.

St Luke, who tries to set out an orderly narrative of the life of Jesus for Theophilus, in his Gospel, tells of John’s birth, his life in the wilderness and his preaching. But it is St Mark, writing to a gathered group of Christians who are being persecuted and killed for their faith, who tells us of John’s dramatic death at the instigation of Herodias’ and her daughter, Salome.

John the Baptist had begun his preaching of repentance in the desert places alongside the River Jordan, a 40 kilometre trek from Jerusalem.

His message to the people, who flocked to listen to him, was crystally clear and transparently unambiguous: sort yourselves out, get real, look around you, read the signs of the times, get ready to meet the Messiah whose coming is imminent; straighten out the crooked and tangled warp and weft of your life; lift up your hearts, your eyes; open your ears – look and listen, the Lamb of God is here!

Once John himself, had perceived Jesus to be the “Lamb of God”, the One who would usher in God’s Kingdom, the one who would take away the sin of the world, he had the humility to draw back, to retreat to the side-lines, so that Jesus might speak for himself, be heard and followed.

As his last act, John witnessed to the Christ, the Messiah, with his blood, carrying out his mission faithfully to the very end in the fortress-palace of Herod and his extremely irregular family and utterly corrupt court.

John the Baptist, in death - as in life - is not afraid of ‘the Truth’. Truth with a capital ‘T’.

In the Judean wilderness alongside the Jordan and in the opulent corridors of power, John’s words and mission and life remained congruent, consistent – and deeply, painfully uncomfortable – even to the bitter tragic end.

Pharisees and Sadducees, the smug and the self-satisfied, those who had forgotten their Covenant relationship with their

Creator, the morally corrupt and religiously compromised court of Herod – all were hugely discomfited by John.

John's words were, at the very least, 'inconvenient'; they were a bit too close to the bone for most people's liking; his words struck home with powerful force – but went unheeded, but for others, those who *had* ears to hear and eyes to see, his words were the gateway to new life, life lived more conscientiously and purposefully in God's presence; a life that *lived* God's promised Kingdom now!

John learned through his wilderness mission, that for a man or woman to be truly alive, the only fixed, steadfast reference point is God; God, the Creator of heaven and earth, of all this is, seen and unseen – whatever else others might say, however tempting the alternatives might seem; however subtly or attractively other messages might be packaged.

To John, the answer to the questions that people had, was clear: Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, the Carpenter-Builder from Nazareth; the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, the One who, alone, could reconcile a fallen creation, a fallen humanity, to the Father; the One would pour out his Holy and Life-giving Spirit to recreate and sustain a new Creation.

John proclaimed, without equivocation or demure, the Truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth Truth; the truth of living and dying in fidelity to the Gospel; of living and dying with the courage to be ever-open to Christ, of allowing Christ to grow within, and let him be the One who guides our every thought and action.

St John the Baptist, pray for us that our eyes may be opened, our ears unstopped, our lives filled with Christ's redeemed and redeeming humanity – whatever the cost. Amen.