

July 11, 2021  
The Rev. Ayo Omoniyi  
The Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

**Prayer:**

We thank you our Heavenly Father and our Protector for given us the opportunity to be at your presence this morning. We pray that you continue to Guide us and be with us through our life's storms. Give us the courage to tell the truth to the powerful and strengthen us to stand up for the poor and oppressed within our community, we ask these in Jesus Christ Name. Amen.

**Good morning.**

Power....

Today's readings placed emphasis on power.

How does the world we live in view power? How do people in authority treat their fellow citizens? Some people like to have the ability to direct individuals and be the final decision maker in people's lives.

In our gospel reading this morning, King Herod hears of Jesus and his disciples' ministry becoming known throughout his kingdom.

Everyone became curious about Jesus miraculous work even comparing him to Elijah and John the Baptist.

King Herod must have been terrified. John, whom he beheaded, has been raised from dead? What a flashback? He must have been thinking that this is the John whom he held in prison for telling the truth. John the Baptist stood up to the powerful by telling the truth and he paid with his life.

John the Baptist confronted King Herod for marrying his brother's wife Herodias while his brother is still alive and to what he saw as immoral behavior and poor leadership.

To maintain her status, Herodias wanted John the Baptist to be silenced, because if King Herod yielded to his pressure, then she will have absolutely nowhere to go. Herod as well did not like him interfering with his personal business.

Later, King Herod had a nice birthday party and he invited the elite and well connected people of Galilee. During the party, Herodias's daughter danced very well in front of Herod and his guest. Herod was very impressed and he promised to give her anything she wanted including half of his kingdom. The little girl ran to her mother for advice. Herodias now got the opportunity she wanted and advised her daughter to ask for head of John the Baptist in a platter and she made the request to King Herod. King Herod was deeply concerned by the request, but granted it as not to look weak in front of his guest.

Let us take a look at the contrast between Jesus and Herod.

- Herod used his power to kill the prophet that tells the truth against immorality, however, Jesus used his power to heal others.
- Herod does not want to appear weak, and Jesus accepted weakness as a confirmation to his trust in the presence and power of God

In our reading this morning we learnt of power from Herod, Herodias, Herodias's daughter, John the Baptist and God's power.

My question this morning is that what have you done lately when God gave you the opportunity to have power may be at work, school, in your business, may be politically or you have more influence within your community than your peers?

Have you used your power to oppress others or discriminate against others? Or did you do the other and offer mercy, show kindness, and empower the weak and the poor?

Today we heard about a story of misuse of power. What have we learnt from this story to ensure we stay on the part of truth at all times and not on the oppressive side?

How do we live differently and not conform to a world that teaches greed and power is the only way to succeed? But, as Christians we are called to live differently.

May be this gospel about Herod is getting too close to home. It is not just a reading from Mark, it is a moral lesson, and we may find ourselves coming up short.

History also showed that our work is not complete. Our country has gone through a lot in the last year or so. Different political leaders have misused their power while others have done differently.

We are continually being reminded and confronted with those leaders who use their influence with inciting speeches and actions to divide us for their own political gains and selfish desires.

As Christians our guiding principle is to protect the vulnerable, poor, and the oppressed. What is the effect of this current situation having on our children, the elderly, the mentally challenged, and the disabled?

This reminds me of a story I read on The Philadelphia Inquirer website

Mr. Edward Martell stood in Judge Bruce Morrow's courtroom, in Wayne County, Mich., he was a 27-year-old high school dropout with a lengthy rap sheet that stretched back to his early teen years.

It was 2005, and Martell had been out on bail when he was arrested in a drug sting in Dearborn Heights, days before his mother's birthday. After pleading guilty to selling and manufacturing crack cocaine, Martell could have spent the next 20 years in prison. Instead, Judge Bruce Morrow's gave him just a three-year probation sentence and words of encouragement. Judge Bruce Morrow showed him mercy instead of throwing him the book.

Mr. Martell reported that he will never forget what Judge Morrow told him. He said 'Mr. Martell, you don't have to be out here selling drugs. You have greatness within you. I challenge you, be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company.'

The Judge told Ed, his door is always open for him, here's my number, I want to know what you're doing, I want you to keep me in your life, Judge Morrow said "I gave Ed an opportunity. Everybody deserves to be treated with a great sense of humanity and importance

For years, the judge got to watch Martell's growth, beginning with his enrollment in a community college, to winning a full academic scholarship to the University of Detroit Mercy, to graduating at the top of his class.

Martell was then accepted to the university's law school, where he received another full scholarship..

Sixteen years later, Judge Bruce Morrow and the former convict Martell shared a hug, both in tears after he was sworn in by the same Judge in the same court room as a new attorney.

"I see him as my son," Judge Morrow said. "It was like walking your daughter down the aisle. It was one of the moments where I just felt so happy. My joy was for him."

Judge Bruce Morrow did not misuse his power but used it to bring out the best in another human being.

It is okay to disagree about things or on how to get things done, because it makes us to be a stronger community. What is not okay is when we hate one another just because we have different views or opinion.

We are called as Christians to build bridges with each other and not to tear them down.

Our Heavenly Father is calling upon all of us today to reflect on how we use power when we are in charge and how we can make this world a better place for the generation that is coming behind us.

I encourage all of us today to use our gift, power and influence to bring Joy, Peace, Mercy and Grace to all people in our community, because that is what is expected from us as Christians. Coming to church every Sunday does not make us a Christian, however what we do and how we treat others differentiate us as a Christian.

We are called as Christians to use our influence and power in the community to attend to the sick, visit the prisoners, feed the hungry, cloth the naked, shelter the homeless, be compassionate to others, bring joy and show mercy to the poor and oppressed.

So we have a choice. The call to us is to respond to God's love in a way that is faithful i.e. to show love to others even when we have power to do differently.

Who would you rather follow?

- Herod or John?
- Herodias or Jesus?

I encourage all of us to seek and serve our Lord Jesus Christ in all being, especially those with whom we disagree with.

Amen.