



## July 15,2018 - This Changes Everything Given by Rev. Mattei

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing;  
it is the gift of God"* (Ephesians 2:8)

The youth who have participated in the National Youth Gathering in Houston a few weeks ago are familiar with Eph. 2:8. It was the theme for the Gathering: all testimonials, all activities and the music selection were based on the faith, hope and love of God in Jesus through the Spirit given to us. Those who have been called closer to God have also been touched by the grace of God and sent to love in service to others. (You may hear their story by clicking on this [link](#).)

When we get closer to God as to a burning bush we soon realize that we are on holy ground and the passion of the living God for those who suffer becomes contagious; God is revealed as listening to the cry of the poor and a Liberator of those who suffer; one is ultimately compelled to go and to speak truth to the powerful ([Ex 3](#)). Prophets are pulled out of their daily routine ([Am 7:14-15](#)) and given a message that people will not appreciate ([Mk 6:4](#)); indeed it may create bitterness ([Ez 3:1-4](#); [Rev 10:8-10](#)) and persecution for the prophet ([Mt 5:10-12](#); [Acts 7:52](#)), and even cost the prophet his very life ([2 Chron 24:21](#); [Jer 26:20-23](#)).

In today's gospel story ([Mk 6:14-29](#)) we hear of a lavish birthday party given in honor of king Herod. At the conclusion of a sensual dance by his daughter Herodias, Herod ends up bitterly manipulated into a corner and tricked to honor a promise he had made out of drunkenness, impulsivity and cocky behavior. He is demanded a gruesome compensation: the beheading of John the baptist.

The passage comes as a conclusion to an announcement made earlier in Mark's gospel that John had been arrested ([Mk 1:14](#)). The question that comes to mind is: if this is what happened to John, what is going to happen to Jesus? In other words, if they strike the sheep, imagine what they are going to do to the shepherd ([Mk 14:26-52](#)). This bloody little interlude fills in the time between the sending of the disciples in [Mark 6:7-13](#) and their return in [6:30](#). When Jesus sent his disciples he gave them clear instructions that illustrated not only his methodology (the "how" of the mission) but also the operating values (the functional "why" of his mission) he wanted to teach (vulnerability, simplicity and readiness to depend on other people's generosity) for the purpose of inspiring his own disciples to fully trust God's presence and providential care (the ultimate and causal "why" of mission). The disciples go off in full obedience and unafraid of the consequences.

John's witness is in line with the prophets of old. He tells the truth, and this account tells the consequences of that truth telling. So, even while we affirm the freedom procured by knowing the truth ([John 8:31-32](#)), we also must recognize that it may get one arrested and killed. But how can we know the glory of God and not speak ([Isaiah 6:1-8](#))? At the same time, if the mission we are given does not seem to produce change in people, if our prayer is inconsequential and reality remains brutal, if our prophetic words are silenced and those in power are unmoved, react with pride and insolence and still enjoy wealth at the expense of the weak and powerless ([Psalm 37](#)), why bother? Where do we find hope and strength to keep going? Truth be told, Herod and all the tyrants of this world, cannot keep us hostage forever ([Mt 10:28](#)): Christ is victorious ([Jn 16:33](#)).

His assessment of who Jesus is gives us an insight not only in the high esteem he had for John but also in the impact that the message of the resurrection was having on him. The power of the resurrection keeps alive any faithful believer who trusts in the Word of God. Even though the arrogant and the violent seem to have the better end of the deal, at the end of the day the Lord calls blessed those who have endured ([Lk 21:17-20](#); [Rom 5:3-5](#); [James 1:9-12](#); [Rev 14:12](#)).

John showed his remarkable conviction that he needs to speak on behalf of the truth and is not afraid of the consequences. Martin Luther was very determined in showing trust in the saving God when in the face of hardship he proclaimed: "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree." Even the apostle Paul was convinced that once one is captive to God one has no choice but speak the convicting and liberating message of the gospel ([1 Cor 9:16](#)). John's disciples also were not afraid of the consequences either, and went to Herod to pick up John's body to give it proper burial according to Jewish [tradition](#). In their silent but faithful action they witnessed to the living God. And they, together with their leader John, were a living application of Jesus' strategy to live the Word in trust, vulnerability and simplicity for the purpose of manifesting God's power and glory to all humanity.

Take the flame of a candle. By itself it cannot exist: the flame needs the candle. The candle by itself if not lit is useless. The flame can exist only because there is a candle with its wick. The candle is not a candle without the wax that bees have produced, and we cannot have the beauty and warmth and brightness of the flame if we didn't have a candle nurturing the flame. In the process of nurturing the flame and keeping it burning the wax melts and gives itself away. A lit candle does what it was created to do: it gives light, guidance and hope. So it is with the Word of God spoken to us: it burns in hearts that are receptive and respond to the purpose of God's creation. The glory of God becomes visible in us as the Word burns, gives warmth, brightness and guidance and the soul trusts the process, allowing for resurrected life to come forth and make sense of what for a brief moment seems sacrificial death.

What we may want to identify and become aware of is the lie that in our fragile estate we tend to believe; the lie about ourselves and the alleged power to save that legions of devils promise to have but in effect they only take hold of us to distract, derail and destroy. The lie that distorts our humanity needs to be exposed and the truth about our spiritual nature affirmed: it's not about becoming the best or doing the best we can; it's about being true to our inner voice that

speaks to us the divine Word about ourselves and the original inprint of the image of God in us. That voice needs to be affirmed and spoken to the world. We may at first appear to be fools as we renounce and die to the lures of this world. In reality, there is no grief but joy as the Word is passed on: the one who was dead has been raised ([Mk 6:16](#)).

Let us pray for discernment, for freedom from fear, and for the freedom to speak our true voice. amen.