

“Sent to Confront Tough Issues”
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Amy Drexler broke an unwritten rule. She asked questions and sought the truth in a company where it is understood that certain practices are not to be questioned. She talked with other employees who became ill from materials used in the manufacturing process. She found out the public was also in danger from this product. She did not want to be a trouble-maker but she thought she should let the people know who could do something about it.

Amy went to her boss and then to the President of the company, but they did not listen. A person from the newspaper talked with her. Amy’s questions about illegal materials and the complicity of the officers of the company and the union was front page news. There was a trial and the company had to pay a million dollars in fines, and the union president was defeated in the next election.

Amy’s work was declared unacceptable in her next performance review, and she was laid off without severance pay. “That’ll teach her not to be a snitch,” said her co-workers. “We can’t have her destroying our profits,” said the President. Revenge!

John the Baptist proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ, and keeps calling the people to repent and return to the Lord. Herod Antipas hears John’s message and seems to want to hear more. John tells Herod that what he did in taking his brother, Philip’s, wife for himself, is sinful. He has committed adultery and gone against God’s Law. Herodias does not want to hear God’s Word or this prophet. She wants John killed for confronting Herod and her, and for pointing out their sin.

So when there is an opportunity at Herod’s birthday party, when Herod offers Herodias whatever she wants, following her dance. Herodias tells her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Is this what happens when revenge takes over? What happens when children get whatever they want? What happens when people make promises that should not be kept, or ignore God’s ways to make themselves look good in the eyes of others?

Herod gives his wife, Herodias, and her daughter, Herodias, what they want. Herod can’t afford to admit his sin, because then his wife, his daughter, and his subjects would judge him to be a liar, not following through on his word. But they are not Herod’s only problem. Herod is under the judgment of God, and we are also when we do not repent and seek to follow in God’s life-giving way. The price of living in revenge, and turning away from God in order to make ourselves look better, is death.

What do we do when God’s Word seems too difficult for us to hear, like Herod and Herodias hearing God’s call to repentance? Do we seek to control God’s Word or make it more palatable to us? What do we do when we confront tough issues in our lives? Do we keep on listening to God’s Word and spend time in prayer in order to hear what God is saying to us, or do we ignore God’s ways in order to follow in our own way? What

happens when following God's way may lead u, like Amy and John the Baptist, to persecution, suffering, maybe even death? What do we do when we want to follow in God's way, but it just is not clear as to what that way is or how to do that?

Jesus enters this confusing and confused world where people die because others want to get revenge; where servants of God suffer. Jesus enters our world where people take vengeance into their own hands, like in the Middle East and here where we live, and many people suffer as a result.

Jesus takes our revenge and death and sin on Himself, and through His death and rising to new life, our sin is forgiven and are given new life. Jesus takes God's judgment on us, upon Himself. Instead of revenge, we receive grace and mercy. Jesus Christ is our hope and the hope of the whole world. We are set free from our prison of guilt and fear and revenge.

Herod admired John and liked to listen to him speak, but he didn't take what John said to heart. Our faith in Christ is more than just admiring Jesus or just knowing about Him. It is even more than just gladly hearing the Word. Herod had done all that. Our Christian faith is taking Jesus in, having a relationship with god through Jesus Christ; it is receiving Jesus as the Word of God deep in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Lord's Supper, we receive the love of God in Jesus Christ into our lives. The Holy Spirit in us holds on to the promise that we are God's beloved children for whom He loves and cares. We receive one another in this meal to love and care for. We may not always agree with everything one another says, but we are still children of God, and we can talk through tough issues with one another. This is the abundant life that God promises.

In last week's Gospel we hear how Jesus sent out the disciples to preach the Word, to call people to repent, and to heal the sick. Herod sent out the soldiers to arrest John, and he sent them out again to bring john's head. Jesus' sending brings life and healing; Herod's sending bring destruction and death.

Following Jesus does not always bring us health, joy, happiness or long life. There may be times of suffering. We sometimes have to confront tough issues, like Amy and John did. We can risk the judgment and disdain of others in order to show the world a new way to live and love through Jesus Christ. We can wonder together about issues of war and peace. We can wonder about why it seems as though God does not answer our prayers, or why God does not just bring an end to evil in the world? We can wonder about why those who seem to have a lose walk with God in their lives have to suffer.

Lots of questions, and not many clear answers! We live in the promise that God suffers with us and His promise is life-giving for us. We are sent to world to bring this life-giving Word and to love the world. We are sent to bring the hope of Jesus Christ in the midst of jealousy and revenge. May God lead us for the healing of the world. Amen.