

## Banquets

Lectionary Post to be posted 7/8 for 7/15/12

### Pentecost 7B – July 15, 2012

[2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19](#) – David dances before the ark in a linen ephod.

or [Amos 7:7-15](#) – Amos' vision: God sets a plumb line amidst the people of Israel

[Psalm 24](#) – The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.

or [Psalm 85:8-13](#) – I will listen to what the LORD God is saying. (Ps. 85:8)

[Ephesians 1:3-14](#) – The sentence that never ends: Blessed be God who chose us before the foundation of the world, destined us for adoption, as a plan for the fullness of time to gather all things in him...

[Mark 6:14-29](#) – Herod, Herodias and John the Baptist's head on a platter.

Many thanks to Don Carlson for writing the lectionary posts while I was on vacation. His posts were well researched and thoughtful, as are his sermons. Many thanks also to Melissa Minieri, who formats these, sends them out to the leaders' list, posts them on my blog and uploads the podcasts.

This is one of the things I have learned to love about being a pastor. The Bible is an intriguing book – a library of books really. There is wisdom and history. There are stories about life and death. There are dysfunctional families, broken people and stories of redemption. Underneath it all lies a message of incredible hope for the world, that God created, and loves with an everlasting love, that even death cannot destroy. Reading this book, and engaging the lives of real people is an incredible joy. Proclaiming hope in a culture that often exalts death is a privilege. Inviting people to live life with spiritual depth and awareness is a great passion for most pastors. Seeing them come alive and gather together around serving the world and following the way of Jesus is a kick.

Let's look ahead to what's in store for the rest of the summer. This coming Sunday we have the Herod's banquet of death, at which John the Baptist's head is served on a platter. We'll contrast this with the Feeding of the 5,000 which is coming up in a couple of weeks. Next Sunday we have introduction to the stories of the Feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus Walking on the Water, followed by the conclusions. We save the Feeding story for the following week.

If you include the feeding of the 5,000, the next five Sundays are bread texts from John 6: July 29, August 5, 12, 19 and 26. In September we jump into the purity texts of Mark 7 and then chapters 8 and 9.

This week's text about Herod's banquet of death must be considered together with the Feeding of the 5,000 which follows it. Mark has placed them side-by-side, intentionally. We will read the Feeding story on July 29 (but from John's gospel, the sixth chapter). This coming Sunday – Herod's banquet. These are two very different meal stories, as Barbara Lundblad ([http://day1.org/1259-two\\_very\\_different\\_banquets](http://day1.org/1259-two_very_different_banquets)) and Gordon Lathrop (*The Four Gospels on Sunday*) have both so articulately pointed out.

### Herod's Banquet of Death



This story is not a "happy text" on which to preach. But it's real. Rule by violent domination is the story of world history. Herod commands fearsome power. He maintains that power by fear. Herod's banquet is very different than Jesus' banquet that we'll read in a couple of weeks.

Herod's banquet is not in a deserted place like the Feeding of the 5,000, but in a "lavish place" as Lundblad points out. There is plenty. Excess even. It is a place of power. Call it a power lunch. There is plenty for a few, while the masses starve. Women are brought in to perform and pleasure the powerful men. A powerless prisoner is executed. The leftovers are not twelve baskets of bread, but death and

decay: John's head delivered on plate, like a pig, like the final course. Important officials are invited. Herod's wife is there, the one he stole from his brother, an act of power which John the Baptist denounced.



Lundblad asks,

*Is it possible to maintain an empire and feed people who are hungry? The leftovers of empire have almost always been destruction and death—even in the name of peace and security. There is always enough money for weapons, but never enough to feed those who are hungry. Into such a world, Jesus comes with an alternative vision.*

We who live in the world's most powerful empire must ask this question. When do the bloody sacrifices of being an empire compromise our ability to serve the world, to be a blessing?

### Jesus' Banquet of Life



In contrast to Herod's banquet, Jesus' feast is in a deserted place – a place to which he took his disciples for rest, but the crowds followed. It is not in a lavish place, like Herod's banquet. Those invited to Jesus' feast are not the few, the rich and powerful, they are the poor, the lame, the blind, as in Isaiah's prophecies. This is consistent with Jesus' preaching (Luke 14:13).

Herod takes a lot and brings of it only death. Herod consumes. Jesus multiplies. Jesus takes a little and makes a lot of it. He spreads things out so that everyone has enough.

The Feeding is an apt parable for a hungry world. "That's communism!" Someone said to me once. "No, it's enough-ism." It's not about everyone getting exactly the same. That might not be fair. It's about making sure everyone has enough, that's all. This is not so radical a concept. It will not bring capitalism to its knees. People aspire to more than just "enough." But clearly, there are

many in our world who do not have enough. Half the world lives on \$2/day. One quarter live on \$1/day. The thing that drives me nuts is that we have the wealth and now the technology to feed everyone. We seem to lack the will. This is my sin too. Me having more is more important than everyone having enough. I reaffirm this self-centered reality with nearly every nonessential purchase.

In a wealthy society we want to sanitize Jesus to spiritualizing him to have nothing to say about the material. Any honest reading of the gospels will dispel this myth, but we're pretty committed to it. "You give them something to eat," is a pretty strong call, right up there with, "When I was hungry you gave me food," and "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice."

When we ponder the world's need, like the disciples we moan, "The problem is just too big." Lundblad comments:

*Jesus knows we are perplexed, but my excuses are no better than those of the disciples! Jesus knew long ago what economists and hunger activists tell us now: we have everything we need to end world hunger. It would take \$13 billion a year. That's not even 3% of our defense budget.*

### What to do?

How might we live so that our churches look more like Jesus' banquet than Herod' banquet? What if our congregational meals were free to the poor? This is how the concept of the potluck emerged. Those who can bring, bring. Those who can pay, pay. Those who cannot, do not.

Here's another idea. Why not collect food for a rainy day? Here in the Gulf Coast we face hurricanes annually. Most families need to save enough food and water to last 72 hours in case of a hurricane. Power will be out. Credit cards won't work. Grocery stores and gas stations will be closed. What if our congregations saved food too? So when the storms come, we can share with those who have evacuated, or didn't save enough food (or shell-shocked Northerners who have just moved down and haven't figured out this is an annual event). We could bring canned goods and bottled water each week as part of our offering, and save it up for an emergency. Then, in the Fall, when hurricane season is over, we could share that food with the local food bank. Just a thought. This might be a great way to live into all the bread stories we're going to be reading in August.

Stories like this may not be pleasant to hear, but they remind us of what the lust for power can do. Jesus offers us a different way of being in the world. Let's invite our people to imagine and live into a Loaves and Fishes world, over a Herod's platter world.