



John the Baptist, the great herald of the coming Messiah, did not shrink from challenging both the people and the King. He spoke, as the saying goes, “truth to power.” It goes without saying that he was “controversial.” Truth always is because it exposes the lies of the day and creates tension, division and even hatred. John the Baptist had to be eliminated by the powerful purveyors of keeping things in their own best interests at the expense of the poor, the hungry, the sick, and those they perceived to be “different” or “unworthy.” John the Baptist heralded a new way, vision and hope. He inspired action and gave to those kept out a new voice. His mantra, the Advent commission of “*Prepare the way of the Lord*,” was never limited to an isolated group, to those who worship in the synagogue or temple of the day, but rather was a clarion call to the whole society, culture and power structures of the day.

John the Baptist was a “troublemaker!” He was “different;” His voice needed to be silenced, his message needed to be discredited, and his vision needed to be extinguished. He challenged the king and the accepted ways and prejudices of the day. So, he was arrested and put in jail.

With that background today’s Gospel of Christ is told, in the context of Herod’s deadly banquet, where the king seeks to satisfy his own desires. To maintain his power, he orders, at the urging of others, the head of John the Baptist, that visionary and troublesome voice of God’s truth, to be brought into his deadly banquet on a silver platter.

Jesus, on hearing the news, withdraws, with a broken heart, to a deserted place. He grieves, over both the death of his cousin and the capital punishment of a prophet. There he must have wept and wondered if his own words and ways would lead to a similar end. Would the “king” rise up against him too? Indeed, the king and his own people.

As he wondered and wept the crowds found him. The crowds, longing for truth, hope, healing, freedom, hospitality, justice and life. The crowds, weary, “anguished, distressed, persecuted and in peril.”

They knew of John the Baptist and still they “took to the streets,” came out of their towns and homes, risking everything just to tell of their own pain, grief and weariness, to tell their story together and to hear from a prophet, in whom they hoped, a promise of healing, justice and a way of living in a world made new.

Jesus’ grief, and perhaps in his own hesitancy to go on, made compassion and love flow from his own wounded heart. *The crowds transformed, nourished, and motivated him.* He saw, he heard, he felt, he loved and *then* spoke the truth. The crowds cannot be silenced; truth must and will be told. But still, even those closest to him, who claimed to walk with him, who believed they were righteous and faithful, were fearful and hesitant. “*Send them away!*” Tell them to go home and take care of themselves, leave us alone. There is nothing we can do for them. We do not have enough for a living banquet. We will not change, we cannot risk it. It is too much for us to see and feel their hunger.

And so here we are. The story is real, it is true. It is seen. The Gospel is about now. We are, believe it or not, the disciples of Jesus, gathered with the crowds of today who long for truth, justice, hope and welcome. We too are grieving, wounded, too often afraid, and unsure of the gifts we have. “*There is nothing I can do.*” The words of those first disciples still echo through our world, and even, sometimes through our Church: “*Send them*

away, tell them to go home.” We cannot bear to hear of their struggles, the pain they endure, the hunger they feel. There is nothing we can do anyway. Send them away from us. But the same haunting words also speak back through the ages: *“There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.”* Look, see, listen, hear... you have enough. Host a banquet of life, and there will be more than enough left over.

Go, from this living banquet around this Table, where we are nourished, to satisfy the needs of the “crowds” with what we have received.

Let the “people in the streets,” as they did for Jesus, transform, nourish, and motivate us, teaching us, finally, to hear the Gospel, through

the hunger and weariness of others. Change us, open our eyes, ears and hearts. Let compassion and love flow from our own wounded, hesitant or grieving hearts.

Go from this living banquet into the streets. Be a bit troublesome and controversial. *“Prepare the way of the Lord.”*

The food we give is our willingness to see, hear and feel. The loaf we offer is our attention, awareness and care. The bread we break and give is the voice of truth, naming the hunger and feeling the struggle.

CHRIST BE OUR LIGHT. GIVE US EARS TO LISTEN!
TRANSFIGURE US!

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