

MINNESOTA VALLEY CHURCH; July 14, 2024
8th Sunday after Pentecost; Singers: “youth” praise team

THEME: NEED FOR NATIONAL REVIVAL, LIVING IN TIMES OF PERSECUTION AND CORRUPT LEADERSHIP, GOD IS ULTIMATELY IN CONTROL

PRELUDE: Rebekah Olson

CALL TO WORSHIP: From Psalm 85

PASTOR: I will listen to what God the LORD will say; He promises peace to his people, his saints--

ALL: But let them not return to folly.

PASTOR: Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,

ALL: That his glory may dwell in our land.

PASTOR: Love and faithfulness meet together;

ALL: Righteousness and peace kiss each other.

PASTOR: Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,

ALL: And righteousness looks down from heaven.

PASTOR: The LORD will indeed give what is good,

ALL: And our land will yield its harvest.

PASTOR: Righteousness goes before him

ALL: And prepares the way for his steps.

HYMN #178 “Oh, Worship the King”

PASTOR ONLY: *Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

PASTOR & CONGREGATION: *We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen*

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE:

READER: BECKY KRUSE

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: Amos 7:7-15 *This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. 8 And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. 9 "The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam." 10 Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. 11 For this is what Amos is saying: "'Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.'" 12 Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. 13 Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." 14 Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. 15 But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'*

EPISTLE LESSON: Ephesians 1:3-14 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might*

be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory.

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRAYER

PRAISE SONGS: 1 or 2 praise songs chosen by KRISTA

SERMON: "THE PERSECUTED CHURCH: DEMONIC RULERS" Mark 6:14-29 Pastor Tom Olson *Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen*

BURDEN: My sermon last Sunday was about speaking up, so I must speak up for the persecuted church. Three different groups today are targeting Christians. They are:

- Communists (North Korea, China, Russia, Cuba, Southeast Asia)
- Muslims (countries too numerous to name, including Europe)

- Secularists (United States, Canada and the European Union) and their partners in the apostate Christian churches.

They all want to control people and Christians are harder to control because they are not living for this world, they are ready to die, and they take their orders from the Word of God.

PRICE: John the Baptist spoke up, he confronted King Herod about his sins and paid the ultimate price. Herod is afraid that Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead. Let's look at King Herod and see traits of many, if not most, of our powerful world rulers today who are attacking Christians. Mark 6, beginning at verse 14, **THE PERSECUTED CHURCH (AND DEMONIC RULERS)...**

I. A PARANOID KING: POWER ADDICTION

Mark 6:14-16 *King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." 16 But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"*

OBSESSION: The number one priority of any powerful person, like paranoid King Herod, is **STAYING IN POWER**. Power has privileges like money, beautiful women, fine foods and servants. But that is not the primary reason for staying in power. Power is a highly addicting force.

BOSTON: One day I was riding down the freeway in Boston in a new Porche with a wealthy, international business man. He knew I was a pastor and as a Catholic was sort of having a time of confession with me. He looked at me and out of the blue said,

“Money is nothing and sex is nothing; once you have tasted power it is the most addicting force of all.”

DELUSIONS: Once any of us get power, we do crazy things to hang on to it. It can be power over the checkbook, power in a church, power in a company, power over the family. People will attack those who threaten their power. Losing power makes some people do nasty things.

HEROD: Herod was obsessed with John the Baptist because he was a threat to His power. He was exposing his rotten life that was behind the regal façade of his reign. Herod owned the Jewish religious leaders because he financed the world-renowned temple restoration. He was Caesar’s puppet ruler. And he was one of the mentally sickest men of his day.

MEGALOMANIACS: Many world rulers in history and today, perhaps most, are something we call megalomaniacs, people who are obsessed with their own power. These people are drawn to powerful positions and only get worse once they hold them.

RESOURCES: The sad truth is that these people have tremendous resources at their disposal to destroy their opponents. They do it to keep people in fear and keep them in power.

PROPHETS: God raises up prophets to preach to rulers and call them to repentance. But they kill the prophets. God’s heart is for us to have good leaders but our hearts are sinful and we elect bad leaders. In Matthew 23 Jesus confronts the powerful religious leaders and calls them snakes, whitewashed tombs, lovers of money, murderers of prophets, blind guides and concludes with this heartfelt cry in verse 37 *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”*

PUPPET: Herod was a paranoid puppet of Caesar. The real power today is behind the scenes with names we don’t even know. I recently saw in interview with a national financial leader who operates in the highest circles of power. He was asked the question, **“Who is the most powerful person in the United States?”** The answer surprised me. It was not the president. The man being interviewed said this, **“You don’t even know his name!”** I once met a wealthy man who would not tell me his last name.

DEMONIC: Some people are so obsessed with power that I would guess they are even demon possessed. Paranoid, demon possessed rulers are much more common in history than we care to admit. All of us here struggle to some degree or another with addiction to power over others. It is the universal struggle. A PARANOID KING: POWER ADDICTION... Persecution also comes from...

II. A SICK PALACE: CORRUPT COMPANIONS

Mark 6:17-28 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. 21 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." 23 And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." 24 She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. 25 At once the girl hurried in to the king

with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother.

COMPANIONS: Those who persecute Christians surround themselves with very mentally sick people. They attract people of a similar spirit. They attract people who will sacrifice morals, principles and values for the sake of getting ahead. Herod's brother had a power-hungry wife who left her husband, Herod's brother, and married Herod the Great so she could be the most powerful woman in the land. John the Baptist confronted them about their unlawful and immoral marriage. Notice that Herod feared John and "liked to listen to him." But Herodius nursed a grudge against John and waited for an opportunity to put him to death.

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

APPOINTEES: Rulers can't decide on everything so they need people under them to run the military and all the departments of state. You can tell a lot about a leader by who they choose to fill these positions.

SPOUSE: You can tell a lot about a ruler by who they are married to. One's spouse can have a powerful influence on their decisions. It is said that Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt was a powerful force in the White House. She did not even let Vice-President Truman into the White House until her husband's death forced her to let him in. She was east coast blue blood and Truman was a mid-western farmer and beneath her social status. Truman's wife, Bess, was a wonderful, plain lady who kept Harry pointed down a much better path than he might have chosen. I am not so certain that Jill and

Hunter Biden want to give up the power they have in the Whitehouse!

ENEMIES: You can also tell the character of a leader by who are their enemies and people they avoid. Eleven years ago, Tulsi Gabbard was the up-and-coming star freshman congress woman, a Democrat from Hawaii. She was quickly advanced to be Vice-Chair of the DNC and speaking at all the elite dinners in Washington. But Tulsi is a disciplined and intelligent 21-year military officer who has been deployed in active duty to two war zones. She is a champion of freedom, free speech and integrity. When Washington D.C. found out that she asked hard questions and could not be bribed or threatened the entire establishment spit her out. A top Democrat and top Republican tried to destroy her by labeling her as a traitor and Russian asset. She didn't take that false accusation lightly. I would be impressed with anyone who associates with her, even though I disagree with her on some points. You can be wary of a person who has people of integrity as enemies.

REVEALING: If a person is surrounded by immoral, dishonest and non-intelligent people, it tells you what they really are about. Herod had a sick place where very immoral and murderous plans were hatched. Finally, PERSECUTION AND DEMONIC LEADERS...

III. A HUMBLE RESPONSE

Mark 6:29 On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

DEATH: What can be the response of followers of Jesus Christ in a world gone mad with immorality, corruption, greed and murder? We can DIE WELL and bury our dead with dignity and hope. Physical death is the great equalizer.

TOMB: The testimony we can have to the corrupt pleasure-loving world we live in is **to die well**. John's disciples took his body and placed it in a tomb. They prepared it for the resurrection of the dead.

BURIAL: Some of my best ministry is to help people die well and have a powerful gospel testimony in their funeral. The best part of the funeral is the burial at the cemetery. Often times there are many family members who do not know Christ or have saved souls. They are not at all prepared for eternity. They live their lives at a fast pace, filled with activities that keep them from contemplating their impending death and eternity. But at the cemetery it becomes real. It is a brief moment to help them think about their eternal destiny in heaven or in hell. I consider it to be one of the most important moments in my ministry.

DEATHBEDS: John the Baptist died in peace as they cut his head off. King Herod died a miserable death. Some of the most powerful world leaders who have persecuted Christians die miserable deaths. Take time to read about the deaths of people like Communist Joseph Stalin or Satanist Anton LaVey or atheist Voltaire. Listen to the dying words of Colonial American Atheist, Thomas Payne, who wrote "The Age of Reason." The nurse attending him wrote down his last words. Payne said, ***"Stay with me, for God's sake; I cannot bear to be left alone, O Lord, help me! O God, what have I done to suffer so much? What will become of me hereafter? I would give worlds if I had them, that The Age of Reason had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! No, don't leave; stay with me! Send even a child to stay with me; for I am on the edge of hell here alone. If ever the Devil had an agent, I have been that one."***

COMPARISION: I compare that with the father of someone I met, a true believer, who seconds before his death, sat up in bed, looked up and said, "Amazing" and then breathed his last breath. No amount of money or power can purchase a peaceful death and joyful eternity beyond the grave.

ETHIOPIA: The Lutheran Bishop of Ethiopia, where the Muslims were inflicting serious persecution upon the church, wrote to American Christians a number of years ago. He said that we should not pray for an end to persecution, because it produced the deepest spiritual life the Ethiopian church had seen. He just asked for prayer for the strength to endure the persecution.

COMING: Persecution is coming to the United States and Canada as our rulers feel threatened by our stand for biblical marriage and the right to life for the unborn. They fear us because we don't fear them. Prepare your hearts for what may come. Don't let the love of possessions threaten your faith. These are going to be difficult but exciting times ahead as Christianity becomes more real and the world becomes more evil. Jesus has promised to be with us "to the end of the age." Jesus is Lord! Amen ***Now may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen***

HYMN #628 "God of Our Fathers"

LORD'S PRAYER: *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

BENEDICTION

DOXOLOGY: *Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above, ye heavenly host, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. A-men. A-men. A---men.*

POSTLUDE: Rebekah Olson