

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

July 14, 2024



## OATH

*the problem with promises*

by Drew Downs

Jesus teaches that the problem with oaths is in the making of them. And why is that?

The word *oath* brings images of kids pricking fingers or wizards making mortal promises. But it is a promise—a promise to put something over other things. It is a way of binding our future selves.

Promises and commitments aren't bad. But they can compromise us and divide our

loyalties. Like our loyalties between God and family. Or God and nation.

Jesus offers a different approach. One that doesn't divide or restrict our future selves, but invites and encourages.

He says to let your word speak. Promises aren't necessary when your word is good. When you are dependable and generous, you'll be there.

# ORDINARY TIME

2024

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

**Priority**

In this week's gospel, King Herod begins to crack up as he remembers what he did: he had someone kill John the Baptizer and put his head on a platter to fulfill an open-ended promise to his daughter. Its a weird, tragic story, full of emotions and our own moral outrage.

This, however, is what kings do. They get people to kill other people. Does it *really* matter why? No. But the why in this case invites something *else* we might struggle with. And that is a more fundamental issue that can resonate for us now, especially this time of year: nationalism.

As Christians, we say there is only one king, God. There is only one kingdom, God's. It isn't enough that we claim to put God first and then celebrate our country like it is our own birthday, because there is so little of God in our celebrating. Here there is much more of an implied blessing *from* God than blessing *of* God. Much more manifest destiny and national exceptionalism. We aren't to put God before our country and then pretend a devotion to country is never in conflict with God.

In 1960, people feared that a Roman Catholic president would put the church before the state. But it is the Christian's lament that any Christian ever be president. For they will always put the welfare of the country before the reign of God; not because they swear an oath to do exactly that, but because most Christians already do that.

With love,  
Drew

# ORDINARY TIME

2024

## FOR SUNDAY

*Proper 10B*

July 14, 2024

### **Collect**

○ Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard of Jesus and his disciples, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply

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grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

## Reflection

It is hard to imagine being a king, let alone one in this situation. Chances are you don't have a prison in your castle. But I think we can relate to the interpersonal and the divided loyalties exposed in this short tragedy.

The story's tension begins when we realize the king feels haunted by his decision—a decision based on his own sense of loyalty. He promises anything—and when the girl asks for murder, he feels obligated.

This highlights a different tension: between one's word and one's morality. Why would a king feel so obliged to keep a commitment to *anything*: to kill and to feel obligated to kill?

There are plenty of other questions to ponder, but let's keep it simple this week. Is keeping a promise more important than murder? How do we decide between these things? I'm confident most of us think the opposite, and why is that? Are we so cavalier about keeping one commandment and not another?

Most of these questions are rhetorical. We have hierarchies and not killing is higher on the list than keeping our word—which is good—but hierarchies are built for difficult decisions. It is easy to see why Herod's decision is terrible here. But it is perhaps harder to see that breaking our word ought to cause us *some* frustration, too.

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