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Eph 1:3-14
Mark 6:14-29

In the flash back to how and why John the Baptist was beheaded we hear that King Herod really liked to listen to John whom he considered righteous and holy. He was perplexed by him yet enjoyed listening to John's message about how God is calling us to a new way of being in a new being -Jesus. Something in John attracted the King yet he made the decision to block his ears and heart. Because Herod just could not let loose his familiar ways of the world. He is persuaded by pride, greed, guilt and selfishness to give into the demands of killing John and his message from God to take a good look at how he is living and turn from his worldly ways.

The same barriers that King Herod used to drown out the Prophet and God's call are the very same ones we use today. As Christians and as a church community we say we include God in our making plans and living out our lives but do we really? I know that I ask God all the time what God's plans are for me but then I have to run to the next meeting or write the next sermon or put out a fire (so to speak) here and take care of that problem there.

Maybe I am just down right afraid to listen like King Herod because stopping to listen means I will have to change my priorities. Paying attention to God means not listening to the world with it's false, empty, Spirit- killing message of having to have more power, more prestige, greater ambition and wanting to please others or needing to prove something to someone.

What I am pondering now as a pastor and spiritual guide; How can a church, in today's world, striving through transition, searching for an identity to follow into the future, struggling through change brought on by a pandemic and trying to become what most of us (because we are a product of this society) perceive a successful church looks like-through all these worldly desires- how can we hear God's desire for us while trying to do all this business of being, through all the chaos of busy-ness of life. Doesn't it just seem sometimes that church is the last place you'll find God and that it is very hard to hear a prophetic message in the midst of our human desires and frailties?

As a body of people we are called, by God, to be messengers of the Gospel- the Good news of Jesus the Christ regardless of

where the priorities of the world lie. Faithfulness to God's urgings may bring about hostilities towards us.

It may perplex and confuse many people but this truth, not the worlds, is Emmanuel Church's foundation and our salvation.

Well, thank God for St. Paul, who was also killed for speaking the Truth of God. Who asked God questions, listened for the answer and was able to convey them so beautifully to us. He Reminds us, again, that we can't look to our world to provide God's blessings. The message that cleans our ears and hearts of worldly debris and life killing desires is that God has chosen us, just as Jesus was chosen and has empowered us with every spiritual blessing to be a blessing to this world.

As a christian congregation at this time and this place we have to remember in all our busy-ness of being a church that we are built

on the truth that we are children of God and this is God's house, God's sanctuary, it is God's church, it's not my church, it's not the bishop's church it is not the world's, we belong to God.

That's the message that so confounded and scared rulers, leaders and everyday, ordinary people alike. This summer let's start taking time out and away from the burdens, anxieties and self inflicted demands of our world to listen and let's pray that God will continue to send messengers of love into our midst to perplex us and to challenge us and ultimately transform us into the image of Christ.

Amen.