REFLECTION GUIDE
Mark 6:14-29

Big Idea
The story of Herod and John the Baptist is graphic and tragic. It serves as an encouragement for us to be aware of what God is doing when we are doubting, perplexed, and fearful. It is an opportunity for us to change our worldview and grow in our understanding of God and his ways. Herod’s ultimate rejection of the John the Baptist’s call to repentance is a warning for us to not delay in responding to the work of the Holy Spirit.

FEARING AND DOUBTING LEADS TO OPPORTUNITY
Herod respects John and feels drawn to continue listening to his words. Yet John the Baptist’s message and his character leaves Herod perplexed. Herod is knocked off balance and is paralyzed between two paths. He’s puzzled, in part, because John does not fit his existing story through which he understands the world.

For him, life is about power. Everyone is after it. Everyone is out for themselves. Where did he get this story? His father. Herod’s father, Herod spent his whole life trampling on people to get ahead. Remember the wise men and his systematic murder of all the babies in Bethlehem under the age of 2. This Herod Jr. grows up with this and in turn he justifies his lust, divorce, adultery, incest.

Herod must set aside the objectivity of morality and say its all a scheme for getting ahead. In his mind, some people use morality, some people use immorality. There are not good and bad people. Everyone is simply power-hungry. So he wonders… What is John getting out of this? He’s not afraid of me. He’s not afraid of death. He’s telling the truth and could lose his head and seems to be getting nothing out of it. Oh wait. But is he. Maybe there is something besides status and power. What’s happening? His story is breaking down. It does not have an answer for John the Baptist.

MacDonald: Everything difficult indicates something more than what your current worldview embraces.

Fears, doubts, heart-palpitations. Never pleasant, but it means your story is breaking down. And since God is always at work and always in control, this represents an opportunity to grow and be changed.

What’s a recent event or circumstance that has cause you to doubt God?
What has knocked you off balance recently?
What is God revealing about himself?
What is God teaching you about your heart?
Are you able (yet) to see God’s wisdom?

FEARING AND DOUBTING LEADS TO DECISION
21 But an opportunity came
Opportunity came… for who? Herodias. The whole time she’s been planning, scheming, waiting for her opportunity for vengeance. She knows how much Herod likes a good party and pleasing his guests. She knows how much he wants to impress his courtiers. If she can get him to promise something to her or her daughter, she could have what she wants.

This moment comes when Herod has to decide. He KNEW John was righteous, holy and he reverenced him. His words were sweetly cutting. Growing in the fear of God. Yet he has now been trapped. He never thought he would have to choose between God and his reputation and power. He had to choose. Heart racing, all eyes on him. He’s looking around. JB’s words echoing. But he calculates what he would lose if he does not keep his word. He sobered up from being “exceedingly sorry” i.e suffering agonizing torment.
but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. 27 And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head.

In this moment Herod lost his soul… never to be recovered. how do we know? When Jesus goes before Herod just a couple years later… all he does is mock. No spiritual interest and Jesus does not say a word to him.

35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

What can we learn from this and this whole scene?

1) YOU CANNOT CONTROL THE OPENNESS AND TENDERNESS OF YOUR HEART  This is here as a warning to us this morning. 10 days, 10 years from now you will not be capable of doing what you are capable of doing now. When you are fearful, doubting, anxious…God is calling you to get a new worldview. Its a window that may not last forever. You are feeling pressed to give yourself to the biblical God in the fullest way possible… never think… I should do that but I need to consider more. You are not in control of that. Is 55 - Seek the lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Herod is a warning for us. If there is anything you know you should do, don’t put it off.

2) EVERYONE IN THIS PARTY IS REALLY A SLAVE
Soren kierkigard: sin is building your identity on anything that is not God. The human condition is that we are building our self-esteem on something. looks, causes, career, relationships. And whatever that is, you are a slave to it. Why? because we are afraid of what life will be without it.

Herodias - slave to her own lust and power. She dumped her husband, who was not included in the family inheritance and just a private citizen in Rome. Her pride wont let her repent and against all wisdom and virtue can see nothing but vengeance. She is not free.
Salome - slave to her mom’s agenda - so much so that she would disgrace herself in front of all the royals.
Herod - slave to his own quest for lust and power.

3) WE CAN BE JUST LIKE THIS
to the extent that our esteem and worth and joy is not rooted in the love of Jesus, we are a slave. We become pawn in the hand of anyone we look to for those things. and any disturbance of those things (failure, breakup, etc) can cause to waver, stumble, perplexed. If Career is your foundation: slave to something going wrong with your boss. If Family your foundation: slave to something wrong with your kids. Friends your foundation: slave to any change or conflict

4) JOHN IN THE DUNGEON IS ACTUALLY FREE
The contrast between Herod and JB could not be more stark. Prince/prisoner, unrighteous/righteous, revile in wickedness, preacher of repentance. But at the root… it was who they feared. Herod roots his identity in the fear of man. JB in the fear of God. Because he feared God, he was FREE from the fear of man and death and nothing could stop him from proclaiming the truth.

What is God calling you to do and you are resisting? Why?
What have you been a slave to recently?
How do you know this?

FEARING AND DOUBTING CAN LEAD TO TRIUMPH
We think of JB as crazy eyed prophet, super-human person… you never associate him with weakness… but he had his own moment of stumbling, wavering doubting while he was in Herod’s prison.
Matthew 11:2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his
disciples 3 and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

Why is John doubting?
He’s been nothing but faithful. From the moment of birth, set aside to be THE last and greatest old
testament prophet. Raised by the Essenes. A jewish sect that lived in the wilderness outside Jerusalem
and were extremely ascetic and wrote much about the coming messiah. He’s sacrificed his whole life for
this. And BECAUSE of his obedience and fearless preaching of truth now finds himself alone. Between
the visits from the last few disciples and conversations with Herod. he is alone and God is silent.

Paul Miller - Sometimes when we say that God is silent. What’s really going on is that  he has hasn’t
told the story the way we wanted it told. He will be silent when we want him to fill in the blanks of the
story we are creating. BUT with his own stories, the ones we live in, he is seldom silent. (chart -
wrong story/right story)

There’s something wrong with his story/worldview and Jesus is about to give a new one. Jesus replies…
Matt 11;4 And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive
their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up,
and the poor have good news preached to them.

How is Jesus redirecting John? Look how he responds. What does he not say??? How dare he, after all
we’ve been through?!?! After all you have seen? No. And here we get an insight into how Jesus deals
with the doubt. He does not blow him away. Doubting is not a moral failure. He needs to be encouraged,
like Jude 22 Have mercy on those who doubt.

He’s showing mercy, but also not letting him off the hook… he’s changing JB’s story. JB got a lot of things
right. “no one greater” But remember John’s message? His message was one of judgement. Setting
everything right. Make paths straight! (what he was preaching to Herod) (Every tree that does not bear
good fruit is going to be cut down and thrown into the fire)

John had begun to think that he was saved by his commitment to Jesus, the quality of his faith. But that
is not what saves us. Look at this story coming up in Mark 9.

Mark 9 22: But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” 23 And Jesus said to
him, “‘If you can!’ All things are possible for one who believes.” 24 Immediately the father of the child
cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

Jesus does not say - go away until you have it all figured out. until you 100% sure. no. He heals his
son…with imperfect faith. Jesus in his response is telling John I have not (yet) come to affirm the strong
and righteous, and put down the unrighteous. If fact, I have come for the moral and physically sick, not
the healthy. I am surrounding myself with the weak and helping them. In fact, I am not strong coming to
bring them judgement, I am coming weak to bear their judgement. I am not coming with a spear in my
hand but a spear in my side will make everything right.

It is the weak with an ounce of faith that get me as a savior. This must have helped John because we
know how the story ends. He stumbles, but recovers. His story breaks down, but he gets God’s. He
discovers its Jesus himself, the object of his faith, not the quality of his faith that saves him. He does not
let up, does not recant. he keeps trusting in Jesus and keeps preaching to Herod and in the end loses his
head. He is triumphant.

How can you relate to John the Baptist?
Have you fallen into thinking we are redeemed by the quality of your faith or your faithfulness?
How could you respond differently in life when you are redeemed by Jesus himself, the object of
our faith?