

How Dancing Leads to Spite (Mark 6:14-28)

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, 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.' ¹⁵But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' ¹⁶But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' ¹⁹And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy person, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²²When 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.' ²³And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.' ²⁴She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the baptizer.' ²⁵Immediately 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.' ²⁶The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Theme: How Dancing Leads to Spite

- The story of John the Baptist killed by the conniving family psycho-sexual drama of self-serving power is sad and grim
- The emotions that lead to John the Baptist's death were fuelled by spite
- Thus, our theme for today: How dancing leads to spite... or is that spite leads to dancing!
- Dancing has had an ambivalent place in Christian life leading to many a person's faith crisis
- Illustration: The old adage that dancing leads to sex or as some of us were warned in our Christian journey— sex leads dancing
- Today in the tragedy of John the Baptist's death we have an awkward interplay between dancing and spite!
- Quote: [Spite \(resentment\) is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. \(Carrie Fisher \)](#)
- Vox Pop: Thoughts on Spite

Have you had an experience of spite? No need to note whether as giver or recipient!

How helpful did you find?

Was dancing involved? Sure?

The Nature of Spite (Research)

- **On the face of it spite stems from darkness: envy, lust for revenge or even sadism**
- **Why do we inflict pain for no gain? What motivates this ignoble behaviour?**
- **Illustration: [Children Experiment with Sweets](#) (Marc Hauser Harvard biologist)**

Children between 4-8 years old were offered varying numbers of sweets for themselves and another child unknown to them. They had to pull either a lever delivering sweets or another that tipped the sweets out of reach. Infants of all ages almost always rejected one sweet for themselves if the other child was set to receive more. Some older children also rejected sweets if they got more than the other child.

The lesson is that negative spite persists: most of us would be quite prepared to sacrifice a dollar to stop someone else getting four. "Spite is the ugly sister of altruism" (Hauser)

- **So there's a sense spitefulness stems in part from an affronted sense of fairness**
 - **Human spite is something altogether subtler – psychological motivations and social contexts influence our course of action**
 - **First, it needs a stable social grouping who are able to spot when you're getting a raw deal, identify the guilty party and be willing to do something about it**
 - **Hauser suggests that might make both spite and reciprocity – the doing and returning of favours – uniquely interrelated human qualities.**
- **Illustration: Public Goods Game (*Nature*, Vol 415, p 137)**

A clue is provided by laboratory experiments known as public goods games. In a standard public goods game, each participant is given the same amount of money, some or all of which they can pay into a common pot. What's in the pot is then multiplied by the experimenters and divided equally between the players, so that even those who put in nothing get a share of its contents. The best outcome for all is if everyone puts their cash into the pot. But that does not naturally happen. In repeated rounds of the game, some individuals hold on to their own cash and hope to leech off other people.

Deterred by these freeloaders the players who at first cooperate start to hold onto their cash. Cooperation breaks down entirely and the whole group misses out on the bonus.

Hauser's view is that our sense of fairness and our willingness to inflict damage on one another combine to encourage the common good and deter people from cheating

- The benefits of such constructive spite might not be immediate, but they are real – in the long run we all benefit more if we can ensure others in society toe the line.
 - Our brains are certainly wired to respond positively to this constructive form of spite even though we might lose out financially
 - Scans show a brain region which responds to rewarding experiences, lights up during altruistic punishment (*Science*, vol 305, p 1254).
- So, problem solved: Spite is in our own best interests and our brains reward us for it, so we should welcome it, right?
- Not quite: Not quite as spite is involved not only in doing bad things to bad people even if it that makes us feel good.
- Video: On Spite (Acerbic Comedienne Fran Lebowitz 7.30 ABC – Feb 2024)

Theological Wisdom on Spite

- The circumstances around John the Baptist's death tells us more than spite is bad
- the powerful Herod who indulged in spite is a warning to all of us who are inclined to use spite as self-serving rather it than for cooperation
- John the Baptist's death as a result of Herodias's dance leads to Jesus stepping up
- Ironically Herod's family's impulse to spite was the pathway to justice and collaboration
- The God of Jesus calls us to a dance that does not lead to self-serving spite
- Jesus calls us to a kin-dom of collaboration and justice

Discussion

- Illustration: [Dancing Guy at Sasquatch Music Festival](#)

What do you make of this viral dance clip 2009?

Who was the leader of the dance?

- This viral clip is a way of understanding what Mark thought was important in the death of John the Baptist
- Herodias through her mother thought she was the key as the first dancer – but Herod who followed made the difference
- Herod and Herodias fuelled by spite tried to kill the party by killing John the Baptist
- From Mark's point of view, John the Baptist is the first dancer as in our viral video
- Mark's Gospel indicates that the person who followed John the Baptist is the real leader - Jesus is the second guy making the party happen

Conclusion

- **Dance & spite sometimes will be more intertwined than is comfortable for us**
- **Dance may have led to spite but dance did not kill the party**
- **The best dance is the one that invites us all to join in and share the good**
- **My mother as I come into earnest Christian faith as a young adult was of the view that you should not trust any religion that does not dance!**