

July 12, 2021

Mark 6:14-29

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So prior to the pandemic I was a person who enjoyed going to the gym,

- I felt my best when I went four or five times a week - -

During the pandemic,

- I switched to walking my dog -

- three or four times a day,

- Raven, our black lab, and I may circuits around the neighborhood -

Depending on the weather and her mood,

- I'm probably coming close to the cardio I used to do

- the elliptical

- and a treadmill.

Now I've never been a big weightlifting person -

- I'd mix in a few weight machines,

- but after all these months away from the gym

- with absolutely no weights,

- I'm realizing that all those folks who told me how important it was

- to do some resistance training

- and work on my CORE muscles - -

- were probably right - -

- And even though Raven and I aren't going to start walking -

- I realize that post-pandemic -

- I not only need to get back to the gym,
 - but I need to change up my routine
 - to use the gym
 - to do more strength training
 - and core training -
 - and less cardio.

- It's time, it seems to adopt a new habit or two -

- and focus on my strength and my CORE

-As I was thinking about all of this,

- I realized that adopting a few new habits -

- and on building my strength and my CORE -

- was not only wise for my physical health,

- but in this post-pandemic world, - -

- it was probably good advice for building

- spiritual health as well - -

- Because for us as children of God

- having a strong CORE -

- being firmly rooted in God's Word

- taking time to talk to and listen to God

- making time for worship

- molding our lives around God's teachings

- being a part of a community of believers

- living out our faith in daily life - -

- all of those core exercises -

- make a difference.

- When we have those practices as our CORE

- then I'm convinced

- that we do indeed live whole, healthy lives of faith - -

- not perfect, pain-free lives, - -

- for we live in an imperfect world to be sure, - -

- but whole, healthy lives of faith -

- knowing the abundance of God's love and care

- And while I usually focus

- on positive examples as a way of teaching

- when we look at our gospel reading from Mark today

- we see a wonderful example

- of what happens when power, wealth and prestige for example

- replace God

- as the CORE values in your life

- For that is what has happened to King Herod and his wife, Herodias

- we don't know their whole story

- but basically we know that Herod married his brother Philip's wife, Herodias

- and John the Baptist apparently told Herod

- that this was wrong

- Herodias, now a king's wife,

- apparently didn't like what John the Baptist was saying.

- She wasn't about to give up being a Queen, - -
- so she seems to make it clear that
- Herod should arrest John - -
- Herodias actually wants John dead,
- but Herod feared John
- and knew he was a righteous and holy man.
- Herod was perplexed by what John had to say
- He wasn't ready to act on John's words, - -
- but he listened to John
- and It seems to me
- that on some level
- Herod must have known John was right
- on some level
- Herod must have heard John's call to repentance
- and realized his mistake,
- but he wasn't willing to give up Herodias
- and as King
- he wasn't about to give over decision making power
- to a prophet like John.
- But nevertheless, I have to think that Herodias must have feared that eventually
- John's words
- God's word would get through
- and Herod would turn away from her

- and so Herodias decides that the best way to solve her problem
 - is to have John killed
- At their CORE, it appears that
 - Herod and Herodias
 - built their lives on their desire for wealth, power and prestige
 - and it shows in the way they live their lives
 - and in the choices they make
 - for instead of hearing God's call to repent
 - to turn away from their sinfulness
 - Herod ignored John's words
 - and Herodias decides to kill the messenger
 - In fact when Herod offers Herodias' daughter
 - anything she wants
 - Herodias instructs her to ask for the head of John the Baptist
- Now talk about distorted CORE values
 - who puts their child in the position to ask for another person to be killed - -
 - not only that, - -
 - but what type of person actually asks for another person to be killed
 - and what type of person agrees to having someone killed
 - simply to save face in front of his guests
- It's not a pretty picture, - -
 - but it helps us to see in the extreme
 - what can happen when God and God's teachings

- are replaced at our CORE by an overwhelming desire for something like

- power, wealth or privilege

- Now let me say

- there are people in power who show great wisdom and lead in a faithful manner

- and there are people of wealth

- who are marvelous stewards of the gifts God has given them

- and there are famous people

- who use their privilege to be ambassadors for Christ, - -

- but in all of those cases

- if you dig down,

- you usually discover that faith is at the CORE of their lives

- faith is the foundation for all that they say and do

- and that power, wealth or privilege

- have come to them as a part of a faithful life.

- It's not the money, power or privilege, you see

- that is inherently bad, - -

- it's making the pursuit of those things the overriding CORE of your life

- that leads to unhealthy, unfulfilled lives

- A whole, healthy life of faith in the world -

- is not something that money, power or privilege can buy

- A whole, healthy, fulfilled life

- is something that comes to us

- as the result of God's gracious love for us

- and our response to that love
- Now as I said,
 - I'm planning to head back to the gym soon
 - and when I do, I'm planning to focus on strength and building my core -
 - which means I have a little research to do before I go back -
 - since I admit, I don't know exactly which exercises
 - I should do,
 - but I do have a sense of what sort of exercises
 - might help us strengthen the CORE of our relationship with God - -
- So here are three simple spiritual exercises
 - that we can do each day
 - to strengthen our faith CORE
- 1st
 - When you wash your face, remember your baptism
 - I borrowed that one from Luther
 - and I think it's a great place to start
 - whenever you splash water across your face
 - remember the water poured over you in baptism
 - remember that you are called and claimed as a child of God
 - in the waters of baptism
 - remember the promise of Christ's death and resurrection
 - that you are united to in those waters
 - and remember the promise that the spirit is always with you.

- 2nd

- Study and Pray

- once a day,

- once a week

- whatever works best for you

- intentionally set aside time

- to read a few verses of scripture

- or a devotional book or email - -

- so you can begin to hear what God is saying to you

- and talk to God in prayer,

- it doesn't have to be a long prayer

- something like

- Dear God,

- Thank you for giving me this beautiful day.

- Amen.

- would be a perfectly wonderful way to start

- just open the conversation

- So remember your baptism - -

- study and pray

- and 3rd

- be a part of the community of believers

- now obviously you are here this morning,

- in-person and in a digital space,

- so you know Lutheran Church of Our Saviour

- is a wonderful place

- to be a part

-of a community of believers,

- so whether it is in-person or online

- be intentional about connecting with other people of faith

- so that you can share in mutual support and guidance

- as you live a life of faith in the world.

- So as you build your life of faith this week,

- my suggestion would be -

- Give one of those three exercises a try -

- don't try to do all of them at once,

- just pick one that matches who you are and give it a try -

- and then maybe when that is firmly in place,

- think about adding the second - -

- but for now, just try one -

- and when you do,

- I think you will find

- that you will indeed strengthen your CORE - -

- your relationship with God, - -

- your experience of God's love and presence in your life

For with God as the CORE of our lives,

- I think we discover

- healthy ways to deal with the problems and difficulties that life throws at us
- I think we experience
 - the wholeness that comes from generously sharing our gifts in God's service
- and I think we know
 - the joy that comes from promise of everlasting life with God.