**“Stand Therefore”**

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Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Ephesians 6:10-20

Mark 7:14-23

 14th Sunday after Pentecost, Aug. 28/29, 2021

A reading from Mark 6:14-29: “King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.” But others said, “He is Elijah.” And others said, “He 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 it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.” And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. For when Herodias's daughter 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 to you.” And he vowed to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.” And she went out and said to her mother, “For what should I ask?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist.” And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=mark+6%3A14-29&version=ESV#fen-ESV-24431d)] head. He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Bridge

Along with **our charge** to **militantly** **“Stand Therefore”** as the book of Ephesians closes-out saying, we’re also in the weekend festival that remembers the martyrdom of John the Baptist. “**Standing Therefore”** and **martyrdom** are the same topic. A **warrior** honored to be willing to **die in battle for the Lord’s cause** is **nobility of the highest degree**. That **battlefield** may be blood-filled or sterile (as a hospital room). It, mostly, will be in your house or work-place / school. It will be **where** your identity as the Lord’s is most to be **evidenced** and **exercised**. It will be **where** **your witness** is demanded you. It will be where “what you **say**” **proves-out** to be “what you **do**”.

**Text**

Ephesians leaves us with an acknowledgment of the **warfare that Christianity demands of us**. Thrust upon a Christian is the fact that **we have been made enemies of a secular world both common and, very often, profane, and a whole set of principalities (demonic) who would want us for food for all of eternity so work very hard (even if subtly) to acquire us for such an afterlife**. And Hell on earth (the “slippage” away from God’s duty, no matter how **entertaining** it might be) is a **choice** just as surely as is the forever-after Hell is. And the temptation is **temptingly presented to choose that less demanding direction** hundreds and, maybe, thousands of times each day. **War is waged** upon Christians on television and through peer pressures. It’s waged by **internal** laziness and **external** suggestions. It’s **waged** by strangers, acquaintances, and, probably, family members in slippages almost invisible, yet steady enough to make effect dangerously. It’s **guarded against** by texts like Ephesians 6 and Deuteronomy 4 and Mark 7 (and 6), and yet often **“forgotten” quickly** as a first step toward a horrible fall.

Ephesians suggests **ammunition** those who care to be faithful soldier’s in the cosmic war. It’s “truth” and “righteousness”. It’s the “Gospel” and “faith”. It’s “salvation” and “God’s Word” (the “sword of the Spirit”), and all of that, not some of it. It’s **content not sentiment**, **“strength” not mood** … and as much as it can be described, it can only be **exemplified** through the examples of people who’ve actually **stood for it (and accurately IT)**.

That’s where John the Baptist comes in. He, but the apostles and, probably, so many (now) Afghan Christians and Haitian Christians baptized and humble yet boldly held-together in Christ, are in a position to, now, **demonstrate** what it might take to “**stand for truth**”. No one’s a hero standing for a lie or self-righteousness and vain virtue, but to **stand for the righteousness of Christ embattled and sacrificed for them, and that gifted as free grace upon a repentant us,** **that** **sinners-made-saints do**.

John the Baptist was **accurate** and **bold** in, at least, the documented points of his life. He **recognized His Lord** while yet in his mother’s womb and celebrated His nearness (which is what can be done after recognition). He **grew consistent with the calling that he came to learn**, but first was taught it: his mother and father telling him what angels and the Old Testament said about him, him **taking all of that in,** **willing to be instructed toward faithfulness**. Grown, he **served as he was called: announced Who he was to announce in “God’s Lamb who’d take away the world’s sin”**. And he **took the incarceration of those who’s pleasure he didn’t seek, calling sin to repentance, and saying that right and wrong does matter**.

John got **beheaded in a jail cell for his faithfulness**. He received no earthly benefit. He sought no promotion or raise. He encouraged no friendships that would make him shirk either duty or principle. His witness was till death. Who knows his sins of action or inaction undocumented, but what is known is that every one got (what we can have) is **forgiven of them as confessed**.

**Application**

**I’ve watched heroes / martyrs / saints sainted by grace and expressing that gift in witness**. Not much of the heroism that I’ve seen would inspire movies. It **should** be, but likely **wouldn’t** be chosen for it. It is all, though, **noteworthy** and the **stuff of great stories**. And the **documentation in Heaven of divine witness** is (I guarantee you) substantial. And there are **earthly heroes still celebrated vastly in Heaven**. ….

How is “standing faithfully” possible, one might ask? “**Submission**” is a huge answer to that question. It’s “submission” to **those things that we allow to be adorned with in “truth” and “righteousness”, in the “Gospel” and “faith” with “salvation” and “God’s Word” (the “sword of the Spirit”)**. And “putting on the whole armor of God” is not a **human act**, but **God’s acts that He’s promises upon in Word, Sacrament read, mark, learned, and inwardly digested**. It’s what Ephesians has been **all about**. A Christian **identity** is **one made for duty** **(made His by eternal edict, baptized to it, grown into it, washed and made to be “in splendor”, purified / sanctified into it, then adorned and equipped for the purpose of battle for Christ, serving with a selflessness that’s only that because it’s not our act, but filled with God’s that we just do because it’s our duty**).

Places around this world (and history) will always show us **graphic examples** of faithful Christian martyrdom, but the **quiet duty of one fulfilling their divine call as a spouse or parent, child or employee or employer or classmate, that (being deliberately or through great habit) Christ’s till death will BE heroic**. Stability in the correct things, “**Standing Therefore**” (because of the grace of God), **THAT’S** the duty un-noticed by the hero him- or herself, yet spoken-of by Jesus upon His return when He welcomes the faithful and compliments them for their deeds.

Lord, make me (and all of us) to always “Stand Therefore”. In +Jesus’ name. Amen.