

The Rev. Kristin Krantz  
St. James', Mt. Airy  
7/15/18

8 Pentecost/Proper 10B  
2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19  
Psalm 24  
Ephesians 1:3-14  
Mark 6:14-29

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.**

Our Gospel today continues where we left off last week, but is a flashback to the story of Herod beheading John the Baptizer.

The countryside was alive with speculation about who this wonderworker Jesus really was.

Was he John come back from the dead?  
The long awaiting second coming of Elijah?

Like a Rorschach test, Jesus appeared to his interpreters according to their hopes – and their fears.

In Herod's case, his guilt-ridden anguish about having ordered the execution of a person he considered "righteous and holy" led him to a paranoid conclusion:

*John, whom I beheaded, has been raised*

In this sense, this flashback scene helps explain Herod's opposition to Jesus, and – as one Biblical commentary puts it – illustrates how corruption breeds its own anxious spiral into the abyss.<sup>1</sup>

Herod, as we will learn later in the Gospel, will be part of the "Powers that Be" that will conspire to kill Jesus too.

Such is the fate of prophets – as Jesus alluded to in our Gospel passage from last week – for those who speak truth to power threaten the status quo.

But while corruption and dysfunctional family dynamics may seem to be the focus of this story – the real center is the enduring question, "Who is Jesus?"

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<sup>1</sup> SALT's Lectionary Commentary (<http://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2018/7/10/the-powers-that-be-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-eighth-week-after-pentecost>)

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If you ask 50 people who Jesus is, my guess is that you will get at least 45 different answers.

This is not just a post-modern, American phenomenon.

Part of the mystery and challenge of God is that no language we use will ever fully capture God.

We see this throughout scripture – where countless words are used to describe the divine

From Isaiah's *Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace* immortalized in Handel's *Messiah*.

To the great I AM, the Almighty, and the great Shepherd – just to name a very few.

And where, in the first creation story, we are presented with the assertion that we are all created in the image of God – male and female – pointing toward a God beyond our human constructs.

We see it beyond scripture too – as Christians through the centuries have used language to express who God is to them – including our current blessing from St. Clare who images God as a Mother.

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This issue of language for God was one of many topics that was discussed at the 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church, which just wrapped in Austin, TX.

General Convention is our legislative gathering for the whole church that meets every three years – and it will be held in Baltimore in 2021.

Look to next week's Shell article for a fuller picture of what happened at General Convention, including links for more detail.

But back to how we talk about God.

The term “expansive language” got a lot of play at General Convention. And as happens any time we discuss Prayer Book change, nearly everyone has a passionate opinion.

So I want to unpack it a little bit for us.

First off, expansive language is nothing new to St. James' – so you won't see any huge changes in the near future. Every time we use a Rite from *Enriching Our Worship* – as we are right now – we are using expansive language.

Second – expansive language is NOT taking out all male gendered language and making God something God isn't (one of the flashpoint arguments people will bring up). We can say both Father, Son, and Holy Spirit AND Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer faithfully.

The reality is that all prayers – like all translations of scripture – are a time-stamp. They represent the best of our scholarship and theology and belief at any given point.

But faith is meant to be alive. The Bible is meant to be studied, not worshipped. And prayer is meant to bring us closer to God – which means there is no one correct way to pray – and for a tradition like ours that values common prayer – means we have to listen to each other to find our way back to what we can all hold in common again and again.

God doesn't change – but our understanding of God and as ourselves as children of God does – and our words should reflect that.

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Okay – so I just said a lot of words. Now I want to show you what this can look like in practice, so gather around for story time.

*In God's Name* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

~ AMEN ~