GOSPEL MESSAGE

July 14, 2024
LECTIONARY 15
Risk-taking Witness

What makes a good leader? Confidence, compassion, or courage? Popularity and prestige? A quick Google search offers no shortage of books, articles, and classes on leadership. And it's no wonder: organizations, communities, and entire governments depend on the abilities of those who step into decision-making roles. A good leader can inspire the masses and impact the world in profoundly positive ways, while a corrupt leader can cause entire systems to crumble, resulting in devastation for individuals and communities alike.

It turns out these concepts are not new. Scripture has much to say about the qualities of leaders and the consequences of their decisions. The Bible offers several stories of faithful leaders: those who think about what is best for the whole community, particularly the people who are most vulnerable. These kinds of leaders follow God's call at great personal risk. John the Baptist is just one example.

Meanwhile, corrupt leaders are most concerned with self-preservation. They are governed by fear and greed, easily threatened by those on the margins. Herod finds himself in this position. While he may have been intrigued by John, saving his own reputation mattered more to him than John's life. The result is nothing short of horrific, culminating with an innocent man's head on a platter.

Our world is full of leaders who wield their power for their own benefit. But the good news is, God continues to call faithful leaders who pave the way with risk-taking, truth-telling witness. This type of leadership is not easy, and the personal risk is great. John's story illustrates this in alarming ways. And yet, John's story is not defined by his death—in Christ, his prophetic words and deeds echo through the ages. His impact lives on, calling us to the humble, compassionate way of Jesus.

So, what kind of leader will you be? And whom will you choose to follow?

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