**Sermon Based on the Beheading of John the Baptist**

**I wish I had said this a long time ago. Every image I put on the front of the bulletin offers clues about the Lectionary reading and the sermon for each Sunday. Look at the cover image. It was obviously painted during the Renaissance. We all realize when John the Baptist’s head was cut off, his cut-off head couldn’t have been so clean and alive looking as the images I chose. John appears to just be sleeping. The daughter of Herodias, Solome, looks calm and serene in this painted made up mage.**

**The reality had to be that a bloody gruesome head of John the Baptist was presented to Herod on a platter by his daughter. We don’t know how she looked, yet most young girls would not want to carry a chopped off head on a platter to her father. My point here is this paining glosses over the truth of the beheading of John the Baptist. There was nothing right or good about the beheading of John the Baptist. Pure unadulterated evil was in the horrendous act of cutting off his head. Yet evil often masquerades in many guises to mask its intent. Come forward to the time we live in, and there are many examples of how evil masks itself in front of our very eyes.**

**It masks itself in beautiful designer clothes for men and women. It hides itself in sleek words and promises. It parades around until we begin to believe how could anyone looking that good and speaking so well possibly be evil. Perhaps sometimes people don’t even know they’re evil. I’m thinking specially of the three richest men in our country, the ones worth almost nearly two trillion dollars each. No one needs two trillion dollars. Yet these men hoard this great sum of money. If they each gave away half of this tremendous amount of money, they would have enough money left for many generations of their family members. I doubt if these three men think they’re evil. Yet hording so much money when that sum of money could do so much good for many, many people is unconscionable and evil.**

**This week I’ve been thinking of Jesus in a way I never thought of him before. I see Jesus and then realized how far and how much of society has slowly drifted away from Jesus’ commandments to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. I see Jesus standing far away from where we have drifted in our time. How could Jesus possibly understand why we, as a human society, are choosing to kill our earth? The home God gave us to care for with love. Yet every single day many of us are killing our home a little bit faster. How could Jesus even comprehend such a blatant act of destruction? He must cry great tears as he watches the seemingly endless devastation killing of our home, our Mother Earth; more of our world, day after devastating day is being destroyed.**

**The kind of ignoring what is happening all around us started many centuries ago. I’m sure way before the time of the beheading of John the Baptist. Yet the sanguine painted image of this terrible act, reminds us how easy it is to distort truth. Today we don’t have to paint pretty pictures to hide reality. We can turn on the teveison and often scenes of well-dressed people appear before us. All of us are capable of doing wrong, but some of us are capable of doing great harm. When those among us begin to put profit ahead of caring and protecting our earth, they have reached a state of grave and dangerous evil.**

**I think of Jesus when he found out John the Baptist’s head was cut off. He must have grieved for his family member John. Remember when a young unwed mother Mary traveled to her cousin Elisabeth’s, to seek comfort in the arms of her cousin. Elisabeth was also pregnant, carrying her son, who would be known as John the Baptist. When Elizabeth greeted Mary, the child Jesus in her womb moved. Surely at that moment Jesus and John must have recognized each other in their mothers’ wombs. On some level they must have known they were family and had missions to complete while they were on this earth.**

**When Jesus found out his family member John had been beheaded, he had to have grieved him. But Jesus could not avenge the death of John. He knew it was not his mission to do this. He knew his mission was to teach and heal and live out his two great commandments of love. So it is with all of us today. We are not on this earth to get angry, to hate any one of us. We are not on the earth to attempt to take on evil. As I’ve quoted Martin Luther King many times, “Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” We are on this earth to learn to live out Jesus’ commandments of love.**

**We do this by remembering our mission given to us by Jesus, to love God and each other. Every day there is not one act of kindness that doesn’t help drive away the forces of evil. We can decide every day we get up to be kind to those we meet, and to go out of our way to help at least one person have a better day. Over time these acts of kindness become a conscious pathway for our life. It helps to wake up each morning and remind ourselves we are here on a mission to love all those we encounter.**

**We can also do what we can for our home, our earth. Here are but a few suggestions. We can plant trees; we can use as little plastic as we possibly can. We can recycle as many items as possible; we can also pick up trash when we see it. These small acts of kindness toward one another and our earth may not seem like much. But the effect of what we do each day is we become stronger and better at our mission. Our mission, while we’re on the earth, is to learn to love our earth and each other a little better each day. Small acts of kindness, toward one another and toward our earth. make it possible to grow into an everyday routine of love.**

**Learning to love well is a discipline. Like any discipline it takes time and devotion, Yet, the lessons of learning to love grow deeper and more rewarding as we open ourselves to practicing love every day. Amen**