

Sermon Title: **“Some Unjust Deaths”**

Bible: **Mark 6:14-29**

When: on the 8th Sunday after Pentecost, July 14, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live Streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

### **Opening Prayer**

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **1. Two Sides of Dance and Death**

Do you like to dance? I love singing and dancing. Today’s scripture reading from the Gospel of Mark has a dance, which is the dance of Herodias’ daughter. The Bible does not mention her name, but according to Flavius Josephus, a Roman-Jewish historian, the name of Herodias’ daughter was identified as Salome. And another scripture reading from today’s lectionary, 2 Samuel 6, which we do not read, has a dance, too. It is the dance of David. King David jumped and danced joyfully before the Lord, even though some despised his dance.

Usually, dancing can bring us joy. But in the Gospel of Mark, as we read, dancing brought death, an unjust death. Salome’s dance brought about the death of John the Baptist. How can dancing bring death? Unfortunately, this is an unavoidable truth. Even the name of God can cause death. In our Christian and faith history, we love others in the name of God. At the same time, in the name of God, we harm and kill others. In the Bible, and in our history, we can find these shameful stories and realities.

Many deaths occur in our lives and in the Bible. As we celebrate the life of our church members and families, there are many “good” deaths in our lives and in the Bible. Even though we are sad for these deaths, we are so blessed and thankful for the lives of our beloved ones. We are even hopeful about meeting our beloved ones someday over the rainbow and at the heavenly banquet. But sometimes, we encounter some unjust deaths. The death of John the Baptist that we read about today is one of them. This death was not fair. There was something wrong. Injustice was taking place. John the Baptist and his disciples were powerless and helpless to do anything about it. All his disciples could do was to take the body of John the Baptist and lay it in a tomb. Fortunately, the story about the death of John the Baptist was written as it was in the Bible. This passage might be very small but powerful, because the story itself has a power to tell and remember. That’s why I love reading the Bible, because the Bible includes many painful and shameful stories just as they are, which show our real and honest humanity. We might want to avoid this fact, but it is a truth that we cannot deny and avoid. As you might know, many unjust deaths have simply been erased, sometimes hidden or distorted in our history.

## **2. Some Unjust Deaths**

Have you ever experienced any unjust deaths in your life? I hope not to experience any unjust deaths, but we sometimes encounter them directly or indirectly. When I entered Yonsei University in Korea, I learned about an unjust but stirring death of a college student. Korea has many beautiful and wonderful stories, but Korea has some painful stories, too. I would

like to share more beautiful stories about Korea with you, but today, I will share one unjust death, which was emotional, painful, and somewhat thankful, and still inspiring. Korea used to have a military dictatorship during my parents' generation, from 1961 to 1993, a little more than 30 years. I was born kind of at the end of this military dictatorship. During the military dictatorship, Koreans could not elect presidents by themselves. Roughly speaking, there was no vote. The dictator chose the congresspersons, and the congresspersons elected the dictator as the president. There was no end to this vicious cycle. There was no democracy. So, many many college students demonstrated against this military dictatorship, and what is known as the June Democratic Struggle took place in 1987, which was a nationwide pro-democratic movement in South Korea. On June 9, 1987, one college student whose name was Hanyeol Lee was hit by tear gas shot to his head by the riot police in front of the college during the protest, and he died from aftereffects on July 5, 1987, after 25 days at the age of 20. When he was hit by the shot to his head, he was taken to the hospital by his friends. His friends needed to stay there all day and night to protect his body, because there was a possibility of the government stealing the body to make his death questionable, distorted, or hidden. There was the June 29 Declaration, which established a direct election system for the Korean President for a single five-year term. Hanyeol Lee could not see this with his own eyes because he was unconscious on the hospital bed, but it was what he hoped for. Due to the severe brain damage, he was not able to recover. His death was painful, but his death opened the gate towards democracy in Korea. Since 1987, Koreans have had direct elections

for the president, which eventually led to the end of military dictatorship.

Another unjust death I would like to mention is the death of George Floyd, who was an African American man who was murdered at the age of 46 by a White American police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020. The policeman knelt on Floyd's neck and back for nine minutes and 29 seconds, which I assume is similar to my time in giving the message so far. There were three other officers, including an Asian police officer. Thanks to the bystanders' smartphone videos, we know what happened. Have you watched those videos? When he was dying, he said, "I can't breathe" not once, not twice, but more than 20 times—27 times. I know that every unjust death is not that simple, but is often complicated, just as we read in the death of John the Baptist. You can have different opinions. We are proud of the land of the free and the home of the brave. But can we deny the fact that there has been institutional discrimination in our society? Even though we might have different opinions, don't we at least agree that there was something wrong going on, and that we need to do something to address this for our communities? His death was very painful to watch. But his death made us think of our African American brothers, sisters, and friends, our community, and our country. Many people came out to protest for justice for George Floyd, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. I wish that we would not experience any more unjust, unnecessary, and painful deaths.

### **3. Death of Jesus Christ**

The reason why we are here today is because of Jesus Christ. And the life and the death of

John the Baptist prepared the way of our Lord, Jesus Christ! When we see the cross, when we see the death of Jesus Christ, what does it mean to you? We see Jesus as our savior to free us from sin and death. Instead of us, Jesus gave himself up to us, faced death, and conquered death! And have you seen Jesus as being us and suffering and dying just like us? Sometimes we experience suffering, pain, and death that we cannot explain and understand, and that we cannot avoid. We just feel that it is not fair, and we are powerless and helpless. On the cross, Jesus was powerless and helpless, too. Can we see this poor Jesus on the cross? Then, the cross of Jesus becomes our cross. Our cross becomes the cross of Jesus. On the cross, we become one with Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul confessed in Galatians 2:19-20, "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." When we die with Christ on the cross, we live with Christ. It is Christ who lives with you and me. We might look and feel powerless and helpless, but we are not. We have Jesus Christ, who loves us, and gave Godself to us, and lives with us! And we will make more stories with Christ even after unjust deaths.

### **Closing Prayer**

Loving and living God, when we encounter unjust death, please be with us. When we face our suffering and pain, please be with us. When we die, please be with us and live with us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.