**7 Pentecost, July 12, 2015,** [**2 Sam 6:1-19**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Samuel%206:1-5,%2012b-19&version=NIV)**,** [**Ps 24**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=%20Psalm%2024&version=NIV)**;**[**Eph 1:3-14**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%201:3-14&version=NIV)**;**[**Mark 6:14-29**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%206:14-29&version=NIV)**; Rev Mary S. Trainor**

When I am in Milwaukee with my son, Lucas, we often take his dog along the downtown Milwaukee River walkway. On one stretch of the Riverfront, there are condos with grassy yards. On these yards, there are fancy little signs posted that say: **"If your dog poops, you must scoop (even if no one sees you)." Hahaha.** I actually took a photo of the sign *(which you can see on the printed handout of this sermon, available in the Hall or on the website).* But seriously, I took the photo because the sign represents value systems: making the decision to do the right thing -- whether anyone is watching or not. Interesting, as it reflects what is going on inside of the people walking by: the foundation of morals, ethics from which they draw. Fortunately, as I have walked by, I did not witness the drama of seeing someone suffering the consequences of not picking up after their dog.

**"Life is a drama, full of tragedy and comedy**." This is a quote from author Jeannette Walls. Our Bible readings this morning are full of drama, drama that reflects underlying value systems. God gave us all free will. We sometimes do the wrong thing, make the wrong choice. We can do the wrong thing by mistake, because we were careless, or we can do the wrong thing because we followed the wrong path, the wrong values. As Christians, we have been given a value system in the Bible and through our relationship with Jesus. [Psalm 119:105](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20119.105) says, “***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”*** Our faith informs the path we choose to follow: any decision made within the moral will of God is acceptable to God. Today's Psalm 24:4 is relevant here; it says we are to make decisions with "***clean hands and a pure heart***" and then "***receive a blessing from the Lord and a just reward from the God of (***our***) salvation***."

In today's Gospel, we saw the drama of major consequences of a particular wrong decision. King Herod's values were greed, pride, and power -- at any cost. Herod was thirsty for worldly power, and had already made underhanded decisions to gain the power he had obtained. In the midst of all that ugliness, came the prophet John the Baptist paving the way for the Messiah, Jesus. John the Baptist had personally confronted Herod about one of the sinful things he had done: marry his brother's wife! John was courageously teaching God's values as THE alternative to the world's values. But instead of doing the right thing which John taught him, Herod had John imprisoned. Herod was a smart, observant person. In his encounters with John he noticed something special, something different, something worth paying attention to; this something was the divine power that filled John. We are told that Herod had a sense that John was "***a righteous and holy man***" and that "***Herod feared John***"-- and "***protected him.***" So, when it came down to making a decision, did Herod factor this in? No. On that night, in the midst of a drinking party, Herod got himself in a corner, and was confronted with the decision to end John's life. He made the horrific decision to end John's life. Herod knew the right thing to do (free John), but was too weak to carry it out. He was focused on his worldly power and saving face, and ignored God in his conscience. Consequences arrived soon - as he said in a state of utter terror, "***John, whom I beheaded, has been raised***:" he thought he had a ghost haunting him, because of his sin! Herod now faced God's power.

In today's Scriptures, we see other examples -- these examples, however, were of people making decisions based upon heavenly and not worldly values. The Gospel told us, in the midst of this tragic situation, God's compassion, peace, and love entered the scene. It said, "***When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb***." Where did they get the courage to do this? They got it from the "***King of glory***" (Ps 24:8,9,10). They got it from the One who, as Paul put it in today's Epistle, "***chose us in Christ....to be holy and blameless before him in love,***" who adopted us "***as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace....the riches of his grace that he lavished on us***." Unlike Herod, their hope was not set on worldly things; they said we "***set our hope on Christ***..(and)..***live for the praise of his glory***." Christ, the King of Glory, showers us with grace and strength to do the right thing, to make the right decisions. The power that God has is heavenly -- and we can access it here on earth. It's right here, all the time, free for the asking and it is enough.

Another example is King David, who in our Old Testament reading from 2nd Samuel this morning was reveling in the riches of God's grace and glory. David was out among the people "***rejoicing...dancing before the Lord with all his might."***  His dancing with such freedom was not because of reckless partying or alcohol; he was naturally high on the Lord. It was about his relationship with God, and receiving God's free gift of grace. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:10: "***We are fools for Christ;***" this is what David was doing, being a fool for Christ, surrendered to the Lord. Pastor and author A. W. Tozer said, "**The man or woman who is wholly and joyously surrendered to Christ cannot make a wrong choice**."

One person who became surrendered to Christ and who learned about decision making based upon God's values was John Newton. Newton, in 1772, wrote the hymn Amazing Grace, which we will sing this morning -- and oh my, is there a story behind those words! He was an Englishman who followed in his father's footsteps as a slave trader. Newton was also a Christian, and after a while working as a slave trader he recognized that slavery went against God's commandments. When he wrote, "**I once was lost and now I'm found. I was blind but now I see**" he was referring to his change to embracing God's value system. This turn around took great courage, as it had major consequences: he not only lost his job but he was ostracized, as the British economy was dependent upon the slave trade. His courage came from the Lord, decisions based on God's values alone.

It says in the book of James 1: 6,8: *"****be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. . . . Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do."*** Each day, you face decisions. Your relationship with Christ has everything to do with you making the right decisions in your life. Will you choose to look to Christ as your guide, your foundation? I pray that you do. **Amen**.