

Today's Gospel begins with a careful list of all the power structures in place in the time of John the Baptist and Jesus. Like most power structures --- each one looked unchangeable and invincible. First is the supreme power: Emperor Tiberius Caesar. He was an infamous lunatic sadist, who enjoyed throwing people off the 1000 foot cliff of his Capri villa for fun, when he wasn't molesting little boys he called minnows in heated swimming pools while his adoring court looked on. Our next hero is Pontius Pilate: cruel, self-seeking, cynical, totally lacking in character. Herod the Tetrarch never quite got over the monstrous weirdness of Herod the Great, the founder of the dynasty, who killed three of his sons because they seemed too anxious for power; then had his wife strangled, but preserved her in a large barrel of honey so he could visit her from time to time. Herod the tetrarch was finally exiled to Gaul for incompetence. Phillip, tucked way over the side, seems to have been OK, Lysanias we know little about except that for awhile he was a puppet king. We know, unfortunately, lots about Annas and Caiphas, the high priests of the Jewish religion who should have been kissing Jesus of Nazareth's feet but instead were complicit in his murder.

Yuk! These were the leaders and powers everyone was supposed to look up to. These were the powers and the power structures that showed no signs of moving on.

We have power structures we have to live with too. Gangs, broken economies, struggling schools, gross disrespect for human life enshrined in laws so it looks like all we're doing is respecting individual rights. It looks sometimes like these power structures will never pass ...

... except it is exactly into these situations that the miracle happens. The Gospel says: When Tiberius was being disgusting, and Pilate corrupt, and Herod incompetent, and Philip marginated, and Annas and Caiphas hypocritical ... the word of God came.

The word of God. God's energy, light, passion, spirit ...comes and re-starts creation. Just when it looks impossible, God laughs at the power structures, and gets the world turning again.

Today is a day for all people who feel stuck in a ditch, in a hang up or addiction, stuck in a culture or value system or power structure or addiction so strong they think there's no hope. Listen to this famous famous poem praising God's word, from Leonard Bernstein's the Mass(words by him and Stephen Schwartz): ....

All you big men of merit,  
All you big men of merit who ferret out flaws,  
You rely on our compliance with your science and your laws.  
Find a freedom to demolish while you polish some award,  
But you cannot abolish the Word of the Lord.  
No, you cannot abolish the Word of the Lord.  
For the Word,  
For the Word created mud and got it going

It filled our empty brains with blood and set it flowing  
And for thousands of regimes  
It's endured all our follies and fancy schemes.  
It's been tough,  
It's been tough, and yet it seems to be growing!  
O you people of power,  
O you people of power, your hour is now.  
You may plan to rule forever, but you never do somehow.  
So we wait in silent treason until reason is restored  
And we wait for the season of the Word of the Lord. We wait.  
You can lock up the bold men  
Go and lock up your bold men  
And hold men in tow,  
You can stifle all adventure  
For a century or so.  
Smother hope before it's risen,  
Watch it wizen like a gourd,  
But you cannot imprison  
The Word of the Lord.  
No, you cannot imprison  
The Word of the Lord.  
For the Word  
For the Word was at the birth of the beginning  
It made the heavens and the earth and set them spinning,  
And for several million years  
It's withstanding all our forums and fine ideas  
It's been rough  
It's been rough but it appears to be winning!  
There are people who doubt it  
There are people who doubt it and shout it out loud,  
There are local vocal yokels who we know collect a crowd.  
They can fashion a rebuttal that's as subtle as a sword,  
But they're never gonna scuttle the Word of the Lord.

That's a lot of poetry. But today let's remember we're not stuck ... or if we are it's never for long. In faith we do what Baruch instructed: Stand up, take off that robes of mourning and misery, and put a crown with God's name on your head ... believing with St. Paul: I am confident that the one who began a good work in us will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.