

Jon Hauerwas – March 17, 2019 – “In the Name” Psalm 27:1, 3-5, 11-14 and Luke 13:31-35

“There are six Herods in the Bible, and each one is pretty much the same guy: a petty tyrant with a touch of megalomania, paranoid, callous,” beholden to the Romans, “religious but in a conniving way, rich, and often cruel.”¹ During Advent and Christmas, it was Herod the Great who, fearing the birth of Jesus, took a leading role in seeking to eliminate him. And now, in Lent, we become more deeply acquainted with his grandson, Herod Antipas, the same ruler who had earlier beheaded John the Baptist. Ominously, he now wishes to see Jesus.

As James Howell observes, “we can be sure that the Herod Jesus was warned to flee was tougher than the comedic portrayal we have grown accustomed to in movies or in shows like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, where he is cast as a sniveling, sleazy buffoon.”² Curiously, Jesus is first warned of Herod’s plot by the Pharisees, a group of scholars “with whom he shares table fellowship and conversation as well as conflict.”³ They tell him bluntly that “Herod is anticipating his arrival to kill him.”

¹ Ed. Joel B. Green, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year C, Volume 2*. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 55.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴ It's never a good sign, of course, "when even your enemies are concerned for your safety."⁵

Throughout the third Gospel, Jesus' final destination is Jerusalem. Or, as Jesus calls it, "the city that kills the prophets." The Bible presents a lengthy list of those who demonstrated an unwavering devotion to God and who ultimately faced a violent death in the capital. We remember Uriah and Zechariah, unnamed prophets killed by Manasseh, as well as Isaiah and John the Baptist.⁶ Surely, Jesus knows what is coming.

Still, no sooner have the Pharisees served as the unlikely messengers of Herod's plot when Jesus instructs them to serve as messengers of his intentions, as well. He says, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.'"

"In the Greco-Roman world, 'fox' could symbolize deceit and maliciousness as well as intelligence and strength. Within rabbinic literature, foxes are regarded as

⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵ Will Willimon, *Lectionary Sermon Resource, Year C, Part 1*, (Abingdon Press, 2018), 190.

⁶ Alan Culpepper, *Luke, The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Volume IX*, ed. Leander Keck (Abingdon Press, 1996), 281.

unclean pests that should be avoided.”⁷ And throughout the Bible, evil is often depicted as dangerous and predatory, nothing one can flirt with without risking one’s life.⁸

We already know that on Good Friday, Jesus will be put to death on a horrible cross, “not for the things that we usually call ugly and evil, but for the things we call good.”⁹ And three days later, he will be resurrected. But, in the meantime, Jesus mourns for Jerusalem, the city which had repeatedly “rejected and killed the very people who could have pioneered the way to the recovery of its holy destiny.”¹⁰ In his lament, we recognize that reformers are endangered in every age and that, far too often, God’s messengers “have been shunned, treated brutally, and put to death.” While this violent history likely causes us to shutter, it also reminds us of “how determined God is to rescue lost people.”¹¹

Thus, despite this latest threat to his life, Jesus does not go into hiding or otherwise flee from the work at hand. Instead, he continues to cast out demons and heal the sick, participating in very “public acts that demonstrate the power of the

⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 191-192.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

kingdom of God.”¹² As Eric Baretto reminds us, “the prophet’s job is to tell hard truths we do not want to hear.” It is an unenviable calling without “applause and acclaim,” without “prestigious platforms on which to speak,” and without “gilded invitations into the halls of power.” Instead, the prophet will be denied and ignored and maligned.”¹³ Oftentimes, we will recognize “that the prophet is right,” and yet, “still reject them – because to agree with them is to condemn ourselves.”¹⁴

We are now in the season of Lent. It is sorrowful, and introspective, and filled with talk of repentance. Today, I would like to borrow the methodology of successful twelve step programs to say that our first, courageous steps are to refuse to live in denial and to honestly confess our sins. For it is from places of pain and longing that we can be renewed for the work ahead.

Ultimately, “Jesus moves to Jerusalem, not to punish, but to call to repentance.” This, brothers and sisters in Christ, is why we are here. To be honest with one another and with God about who we are. To break this cycle of deception, and denial, and abuse. And to proclaim that in the name of Jesus, forgiveness awaits,

¹² *Ibid.*, 282.

¹³ Eric D. Barreto, *Christian Century*, “Living by the Word: Reflections on the Lectionary,” February 27, 2019, 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

for Jerusalem, for America, and for each of us, to the ends of the earth and always.

May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.