

LENT MID-WEEK 4

Text: Luke 23:6-12

March 10, 2021

Herod

As we continue our Lenten journey walking with Jesus in the shadow of the cross, we stay with our focus on the faces of the people who were associated with the events that led up to our Lord's crucifixion.

As we look at their lives, we can learn from their experiences and gain a deeper appreciation for the gift of God that is shared with us on the cross.

Today, we will turn our focus to the face of King Herod.

Herod was very pleased when he saw Jesus.

At least that's what Luke says: *When he saw Jesus, Herod was very glad.*

Of course, there are different kinds of being pleased.

- There's the **pleasure of true surprise** when something delightful and unexpected happens in our lives.
- There's the **pleasure of contentment** that comes when things go exactly the way we want them to go.
- And there's the **pleasure of happiness** when we experience the joy and companionship of someone we truly like.

Then there is cynical pleasure—

the pleasure we get from having someone right where we want them...

the pleasure of having them on the hot seat and watching them squirm as we close in for the kill.

Herod's great pleasure at the sight of Jesus was the cynical type

because he had Jesus right where he wanted him.

Herod had Jesus in a face-to-face encounter, and he was ready for a real show-down in the royal palace.

As he looked Jesus over, he would soon be able to see for himself if this Jesus was everything he was reported to be.

Herod had it all figured out.

He would ask Jesus for a miracle, a sign to prove he was the Son of God,
and if Jesus couldn't come through, then he would have him put away.

Herod had Jesus right where he wanted him.

He had Jesus in the palm of his hand,
and he was ready to squeeze it shut.

Almost 50 years ago, this dramatic encounter between Herod and Jesus
was very effectively portrayed in the rock opera, *Jesus Christ, Superstar*.
As Jesus is brought into the palace, Herod sings:

Jesus I am overjoyed to meet you face to face.
You've been getting quite a name all around the place
Healing cripples, raising from the dead,
And now I understand you're God
At least that's what you've said.

So, you are the Christ, you're the great Jesus Christ.
Prove to me that you're divine—change my water into wine.
That's all you need do, and I'll know it's all true.
C'mon King of the Jews.

Supposedly, all Herod wanted was a little miracle,
a simple little sign so that he could believe
Jesus was the Messiah of God.

And yet in the face of that demand,

Jesus said nothing and did nothing.

He just stood there in silence looking Herod square in the eye.

The frustration Herod felt at the silence of Jesus is certainly a part of our lives today.
There are many times when we, too, would like to have
some kind of a sign from God to prove his love for us is real.

On those occasions when we find ourselves in difficult situations
and our faith in a loving God is challenged by the trials and tribulations
that burden our lives,
we wish we could have a sign from God
that would encourage us and uplift our spirits
so that we could see our way through to the other side.

And yet as we yearn for these signs,
we, like Herod, fail to see the most important sign
God has already given to us,

a sign

which can be seen
only through the eyes of faith.

Let's go back to Herod for a moment.

He said all he wanted was a little sign.

The truth is, Herod didn't want a sign—he wanted to make a fool out of Christ.

If he had wanted a sign, he would have sought out and spoken to the people
whose broken lives were made whole

by the power of God at work in the ministry of Jesus:

the blind man who was given sight...the hungry who were fed by the sea

the lame man who was given strong legs on which to walk...

the old widow who was given back her son.

If Herod had wanted a sign,

he would have listened to the words of Jesus—

the words which Jesus used to teach his followers.

And he would have seen how Jesus' words

opened up their lives to a deeper understanding and appreciation

of God's love for them.

If Herod had wanted to believe,

he would have listened to the message

instead of looking at the man

because Jesus never pointed to himself in his work,

he always pointed

to the Father in heaven.

**Herod's problem was that he could not accept the fact
that God would choose to work through the ordinary
instead of the supernatural.**

As I say that, it is important for us to remember that

the truly extraordinary nature of Christ

didn't shine through in the gospels until after his death and resurrection.

Until that dramatic high,

there is nothing especially compelling about Jesus

except to the eye of faith.

There are a few miracles and the body of his teaching,

but these are only foretastes or preludes

for that which is to come.

To the eye of a cynic like Herod,

Jesus was little more than a good magician

who could dazzle the crowds with well-staged illusions.

It was only the eye of faith that could see **beyond miracles of Jesus**
to the miracle of Jesus—
 the miracle of God's love at work in him.

Herod's problem was that he was so focused on making a fool out of Jesus
 that he couldn't see God
 at work in ordinary ways!

We need to think long and hard about that.

We need to realize that God works through the ordinary
 even today.

We may not seek to make a fool out of Christ or to make a fool out of God,
 but we also have to be careful
 not to make a fool out of ourselves
 by demanding grandstand plays from God to prove himself to us
 while overlooking the many quiet and simple ways
 God reaches out to us with his love.

God gives us but one great sign of his love—
 and that sign is
 the cross of Jesus Christ.

And that love abides with us and reaches out to us
 each and every day
 in many different ways.

We can, of course, like Herod, sit back and demand signs from God
 that show his great power and might,
 and then turn away from God when nothing spectacular happens.

But Jesus' silence in the face of Herod's challenge shows us very clearly
 that there is no supernatural intervention into the events of our lives
 for the sole purpose of proving that God is present in our midst.

God already has given us
 the only sign we need to see his power and presence with us,
 and God has opened our eyes to that sign through faith.

Unlike Herod, we do not need to clamor for a miracle today
 because our lives are very pleased
 —indeed, they are overjoyed—

to know that the miracle of Christ's resurrection from the dead
 has been accomplished for us.

And through that miracle, we are brought into the presence of our loving God.