

King Herod is threatening Jesus with death. Not just any death but the classic, especially suffering infused death that the Romans were well know for. Slow, painful, public death. And a kind of death that was meant to cut the victim off from his or her family, his personal story, her humanity. Death in crucifixion takes place outside the city, outside the community both literally and figuratively. It is brutal, it is fatal, and it is total annihilation. It is intended to erase the person as if they had never existed.

Which seems like a threat most of us would take rather seriously.

King Herod is a very powerful man. His desires are not long denied and if King Herod wants anyone dead, then its time to either start getting your affairs in order or to leave town. Quickly. Like in the middle of the night if not Right Now.

Clearly Jesus is not like most of us.

Jesus does not appear to be very concerned about King's Herod's murderous intentions.

"Go tell that fox I'm busy," Jesus replied to the Pharisees. As if they had come to see if maybe Jesus could drop by for dinner at the palace sometime in stead of telling Jesus about Herod's death threat.

Jesus' answer is like this, "Hmm, let me check my phone - nope. Sorry. Busy that day. How about three days from now, that good for you?"

Did you catch that?

The Pharasees come and tell Jesus that King Herod is gunning for him.

What does Jesus NOT do?

Jesus does not jump up and start running away.

And Jesus does NOT deny Herod's intention - Jesus does not say, "Oh ha ha, what a joker you guys are. As if Herod would want to kill me."

And then there's this: Jesus does not think he'll be escaping Herod's intent for murder. Jesus reaction is not about the what - the dying - but about the when and

the where. As if Jesus was actually in charge of what was going to happen in Jerusalem rather than the man who intended to kill him.

Jesus's response to the Pharisees make it clear. Jesus did not intend to avoid his coming encounter with the corrupt and fearful king. He just knew it was going to happen on God's terms, on God's time - not human time.

Jesus is not afraid of Herod, nor of dying because Jesus knows that neither Herod nor death itself is the boss of Jesus. And Jesus knows that neither death nor Herod are the boss of God either.

This is one of the most fundamental statements we make as Christians.

God is in charge.

God is the boss of the world and everything in it.

And when God choses to intervene in this world that God has trusted to our care, God intervenes on God's time and in God's own way, not our time nor our way.

Jesus knows this. Herod doesn't.

Jesus is too busy right now to go die. There are people to heal and teachings to teach and this is the most important thing for Jesus to do over the next few days. In the face of death itself, Jesus declares that his ministry of being God's love to the people of God is more important then fear. More important then pending death.

Jesus knows that healing and teaching and being present with tired, hungry, overworked, scared, worn out, human beings with little hope is more important then anything King Herod wants. It is the most important thing to do because it is what God wants. Being with people who need community, who need hope is *still* what God wants. And as a church that belongs to the resurrected Christ Jesus, we are God at work in this world still, we are God being present with those who need hope, who need love. We are doing what God wants - the most important thing to be done no matter what we might fear. When we do God's work, we live on God's time.

In this story, King Herod represents "The Man" - King Herod represents Imperial Power, represents human power that tries to control other people for personal gain. King Herod is a lot like us because all too often like us, he thinks *he* can control the world that in fact belongs to God. King Herod thinks he can keep himself safe if he's smart enough and strong enough. King Herod thinks he can keep himself safe if he can keep the crowds under control and if some of the people have to die in order to teach everyone else a lesson then he's happy to do it.

King Herod thinks, "hey, it's a hard world and only the tough survive. No one is going to take care of Herod except for Herod so the rest of you need to jump to my tune - or I'm the one who's going to die and that's not going to happen." Herod is the anti-jesus. Herod has no hope. He has fear and Herod is still here in this world among us and still trying to control us. He's failing, however. We're learning who is really in charge and who we can really trust - God.

God could choose to compel our love, but love is not love when it is compelled, when it is forced. God honors our freedom. Herod does not. Herod will do whatever it takes to force us into his plans. Jesus' refusal to jump up and run when he is told about Herod's plan is Jesus' refusal to allow Herod to control his life, his mission. Jesus will go to Jerusalem, but on God's terms, God's time. Jesus chooses God.

God chooses to leave the world open for us to choose between Jesus and Herod. Between taking the time to care for each other, to be loved and to love and losing our time and our love to fear that control and robs us of our best selves.

Because God leaves us free to choose God, because it is our option to say yes or no to God's love - we can live in Herod's world of fear....or in God's world of love and confidence. Even when Herod or any of his brothers and sisters threaten our life - we can still choose to live in God's world of hope, God's time of love and care for each other.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem," Jesus calls out like a heartbroken mother. Like the father of the prodigal son. Jesus compares himself to a hen, a mother chicken who spreads out her wings to protect the chicks. This is one of the places in our Bible we can find God and Jesus being compared to the actions of a protective mother. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," Jesus says in sorrow because he knows that Herod's power

will still have its way for a while longer. But not forever because he knows there will come a time when we will say - "blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." Jesus knows that the Boss of time is God - not Herod - and not us either.

Abraham, the man in our first reading this morning is also struggling with God's time. God has already come to Abraham and Sarah and promised children and land. Promising children to Abraham and Sarah was, on the face of it, a ridiculous promise. Abraham and Sarah are old, way past the human time of bearing children old. But not past God's time for them to have babies.

Yet, Abraham doesn't yet know about God's time. Abraham knows about promises and Abraham feels his age in his bones every morning he wakes up and gets out of bed. In Abraham's time, God is already quite late and so he goes to God and complains about God's sense of time. "Where are the babies, God," Abraham asks. "No babies and everything I own will end up the hands of not a son, not a daughter, not my second cousin twice removed but someone who started out as a slave, the lowest of the low, in my household. You promised me children, God," Abraham is bold to remind God. "And there are no babies here."

And God responds. He takes Abraham's complaint seriously. In the end, on God's time, children do eventually come to Sarah and Abraham and Hagar but not yet. God will act but not on Abraham's time. Instead, God tells Abraham to go look up at the sky. God tells Abraham to start counting the stars. God tells Abraham, "As many stars as are in the sky, that is how big I'm gong to fulfill my promise! "

And thats how big God fulfills the promise for eternal life when Jesus finally turns his face toward Herod.

Jesus dies - yes.

For three very human days Jesus is dead. Dead and buried.

Its really important to say this - Jesus was NOT pretending to be dead or in a deep sleep or on some drug that looked like death.

Jesus the human being was a dead as any human being has been and every human being will be.

And then, on God's time, Jesus was alive again.

God raised Jesus from the dead and then promised to all of us - death has no power over any of us.

Death belongs to God who creates and recreates and we who will all die will also all live again.

That's how big God keeps his promises. Not just Jesus is raised from the dead but so too - all of us. We will live again. Count the stars to see how generously God fulfills God's promises.

If Herod knew this, Herod wouldn't have to make life so miserable for everyone else around him. But Herod is caught in the Roman Empire's system of kill or be killed. Herod's concern to defend himself against imperial, fear based human power is proven to be reasonable. Herod falls out of power and is replaced by another puppet king of the empire. In human power games based on fear - it doesn't matter who fills the chair of Emperor. It only matters that the chair exists. The machine and temptation of power grabbing, of having all the food, all the houses, all the fields, and all the people just sucks human beings up and then spits their empty shells back out again.

Eventually, even Herod falls out of power and is replaced by another Roman pet king. Herod goes into exile and eventually dies - presumably and ironically of natural causes. In the end Herod's fear did not serve him. In the end, Herod lost his "Boss of everyone" to another, more powerful "Boss of Everyone." In the end, did Herod think about his rule when he lived in exile in Roman France? Do you wonder if maybe he thought about this wild man, this "son of God" that refused to show up for the trial and execution on Herod's time - but still showed up?

This is how God keeps God's promises. I believe that eventually even Herod will encounter God's deep unending love and make a choice to live on God's time and in God's world. I think God is deeply in love with all of us, even Herod as well as everyone else caught up in the machine of Empire, in the machine of oppression based on fear.

I think eventually Herod and all of us will eventually find out what Jesus already knows. More than God being the Boss of us - God is our friend. God is our father.

God is our mother who wants to gather us close to her so we can be safe in God's tender care for us.

I think we'll all find out that we do, in fact, live on God's time, not the Empire's time. I think we'll all find out that there is enough time to do the important work, the work God wants us to do. We feed the hungry, we clothe the naked, we give shelter to the homeless and we care for the widow and the orphan. We teach what we know about God and we take care of each other because we are the church that belongs to the risen Christ. We are Christ at work in the world living on God's time. We are the stars in the heavens, each known and beloved by the God who is the Boss of all of us, the God who chooses in God's power to invite our love rather than compel our obedience.

God's time still wins. God's time will always win. Go tell that fox we're busy doing God's work today.