

“From Herod to Laughter” | Rev Tim Frickenschmidt | July 25, 2021

Old Testament Reading [Isa 40:6-8](#)

⁶ A voice says, “Cry!”
And I said, “What shall I cry?”
All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.
⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades
when the breath of the LORD blows on it;
surely the people are grass.
⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.

Reading From the Acts of the Apostles
[From Acts 12](#)

¹ About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ² He killed James the brother of John with the sword ³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.
⁶ Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. ⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his hands. ⁸ And the angel said to him, “Dress yourself and put on your sandals.” And he did so. And He said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow Me.” ⁹ And he went out and followed Him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹ When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” ¹² When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ Recognizing Peter’s voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵ They said to her, “You are out of your mind.” But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, “It is his angel!” ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Tell these things to James and to the brothers.” Then he departed and went to another place.
¹⁸ Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.
²⁰ Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king’s country for food. ²¹ On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. ²² And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” ²³ Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.
²⁴ But the word of God increased and multiplied.

Introduction

Last week we looked at Paul singing in prison. The question, now, is we’re singing but are we laughing? How can we be moved to joy and laughter in the midst of our sorrows and struggles? Two points: Herod’s Identity and The Church’s Power.

Background

1. Herod’s Identity (there are several Herod’s throughout the New Testament).
 - a. In Acts 12 is [Herod Agrippa](#), not [Herod Antipas](#) who beheaded John the Baptist in Mark 6. Another Herod is [Herod the Great](#) (Acts 12’s grandfather; Mark 6’s father). HTheGreat was king at the time of Jesus’ birth and not a good man.
 - b. The Herod-trait we find throughout the Scriptures is violence, in punishing innocent and vulnerable people, the prerogative of kings of the ancient world. The name Herod represents our fallen/broken world and everything that’s wrong with it.
 - c. [William Willimon](#) believes our present-day leaders hold the powers of life and death for us. He wants us to empathize with the little band of Christians huddled behind closed doors, fearful that even God’s power cannot prevail against earthly rulers.
 - d. So, who are our Herods?
 - 1) [F Dale Bruner](#) said in Herod we see every person. We see, in person, what theology calls original sin. Herod is not merely the Gospel villain, he is every man.
 - 2) Herod teaches us that the reaction of raw human nature to Jesus’ Kingship is rebellion: if Jesus is Lord, then we are not.
2. The Church’s Power.
 - a. What power is available to us to resist ourselves, our own sin, and the world around us? How can we move from Herod to joy? Earnest prayer.
 - b. There are two essential attributes to earnest prayer (as in Acts 12:5): sincerity and intensity. Like being fully stretched between the sovereign, unbounded and infinite strength of God and the unbearable burden of Peter’s imprisonment.
 - c. Our earnest prayers must also be persistent (as when the church prayed for Peter persistently during his imprisonment and expected execution).
 - d. All too often we stop praying long before we receive a definitive, unmistakable “No”. The main point of persistence in prayer is not in the expectation of God giving us good and necessary things, but in providing us Himself, which He always does.
 - e. Joy is the eventual result of persistent prayer. Our God, who isn’t predictable in the midst of our individual stories, is the One who ends every story with more justice, kindness, grace and joy than we could ever have imagined or known.
 - f. Persistent prayer turns our suffering into joy and our sorrows into laughter.

Discuss

1. Who are the Herods in our lives? Can we see Herod-traits in ourselves?
2. How fearful are we that even God’s power can/cannot prevail against earthly rulers?
3. Is rebellion the reaction of raw, human nature to the Kingship of Jesus?
4. What power is available to us to resist ourselves and the world around us?
5. Discuss earnest prayer: sincerity, intensity and persistence.
6. Discuss how joy, even laughter, is the eventual result of persistent prayer.
7. Prayer is the power of the church in the world; it’s the power of Jesus in the church.

Conclusion/Application

• Jesus is as much a part of our individual stories as He’s a part of Peter’s story (Acts 12). Every part of this story leads us and gives us Jesus. Jesus is as much a part of our stories as he is a part of this one, regardless of what is happening in our stories, regardless of what has happened, regardless of where we find ourselves trapped or imprisoned right now. Jesus is as much a part of that story as He is a part of this one. And that means we can continue to pray, we can continue to pray. Don’t stop, don’t stop praying. Because prayer isn’t impotent in the face of the powers of the world. Prayer is the power of the church in the world because it’s the power of Jesus in the church. It turns our theology into experience. It turns our suffering into joy, it can even turn our sorrows into laughter.
• Do not lose heart, continue to pray. The Lord is giving us Himself through them. Amen.

Gospel Reading [Luke 18:1-8](#)

¹ And He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?"

By Pete Myers (on behalf of David Turpin)