

# **"Run Jesus! Herod wants to kill you!"**

## **Sermon on Sunday, March 17, 2019**

Based on Luke 13:31-35

Reading this gospel passage, a scene from the movie Forest Gump came to mind. In the opening part of this epic movie, Forest is pursued by a bunch of neighborhood bullies making fun of his legs and his mental disability. His friend Jennie, realizing the situation, screams, "Run Forest, run!" It's the moment when Forrest learns how to run. Shedding his metal leg contraptions, he explodes into a rhythm and outruns his pursuers. It's a significant scene, foreshadowing many more occasions in which it will seem that Forrest outruns his destiny.

In our gospel reading for today, Jesus is warned of a great bully coming after him. Pharisees approach him and seem sincerely concerned: "Herod is after you! Run, Jesus, run!" And Herod was worth running from. His reputation as the foremost biblical bully has lasted for two thousand years. In fact, there is an icon, a piece of art, which fuses several Herod's, father and sons, all of whom lived in Jesus' lifetime, in one piece of art, fearsome all of them. But unlike Bruce Springsteen, Jesus wasn't born to run. Instead, he calls Herod a fox, a sly, calculating, manipulating predator, but certainly not the biggest bully in the cage. His comment seems dismissive, even unconcerned. In fact, can you imagine Jesus running away from Herod?

In Scripture there are images of Jesus doing many things – praying, walking, knocking on doors, gathering crowds, climbing hills, calling disciples, writing in the sand, sharing bread, preaching, weeping – but never running. Running away simply is not in Jesus' repertoire! This is neither the first nor the last time someone will tempt him to fear and bail out. It is a temptation urged upon him by people who love him. It is a temptation to which Jesus does not give in.

But that doesn't mean Jesus is impervious to fear, it means as he himself says, that he has work to do and he hasn't finished yet. He stays his course, in commitment to what he has to do. He does not let Herod distract him. He does not let Herod corrupt him. The bully has no power over him.

How many times are we tempted to run, to give in or give up prematurely, to let the Herod's of this world apply their greatest weapon of manipulation onto us: fear! How often do we get wrapped up in the hype of something dangerous, and we accept it for a much stronger force than it really is? How often does it happen that we take our eyes and attention away from what God is calling us to do because of news that this can't be done - for whatever reason and whatever obstacle that's supposedly standing in our way?

There is a sense of discipline here that defines Jesus, and is reflected in his response. "What do you want to tell me - run? I have work to do!" - "Listen, I am busy casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work." Jesus, by sticking to his work and ministry, is modeling faith for us, and faithfulness.

Today, we are not facing anyone like bloody Herod, but there are other bullies that keep the people of the church focused on fear, whether it's scary statistics, unfavorable trends in society, Hurricane Maria, fear of how words may be perceived in our hyper-political climate, or whatever. "Have faith and do your work!" Jesus says to the church, modeling it himself. By doing that you may not outrun your destiny, as Jesus didn't - he would face his destiny, but being faithful and full of faith is a blessing all in itself, and it will bear fruit and our destiny is in God's hands after all, count on that!

There is also a sense of perspective that Jesus brings to the table, historic perspective, paired with biblical wisdom. "Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem." No, Jesus is not trying to outrun his destiny; he knows that he belongs into a line of prophets who haven't been met favorably by the rulers of the palace, whose blood has been spilled on the altar of the politics of the city. Yet he is calm and collected in that knowledge because he is full of God. Sometimes, dear friends, this is the most powerful act of courage: accepting your destiny, even when it's not so great, and going about the things God asks you to do.

In his leap of faith, Jesus compares God to a hen. Not a lion, not an eagle, not a bull - not any of the fear-imposing animals that kingdoms have adopted over the centuries to symbolize their toughness. He says, like a hen God has tried to gather Jerusalem under her wings - to no avail. What a nutty image! A hen - against a fox! How nutty is that? What is Jesus saying here? I think he is focusing on the qualities that the hen has: courage and commitment, caring and smarts, rather than mere teeth.

May we be found with courage and commitment - and smarts, in those crucial moments of our lives! May we have that calm assurance that our destiny is in his hands, no matter what! May we be able to see the foxes for what they are and resist the temptation to run. We too have work to do - important work, holy work, God's work. Look into our weekly announcements for a sample, and don't be afraid to get involved in the holy work of helping others, of blessing this planet, of making a good difference, wherever we can. Dorado is waiting for us! North Wales is waiting for us! Ministry is waiting for us!

There is no time for fear! **Amen.**