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Pentecost 8 B, July 14, 2023

“The Fox, the Fox”

Read: Mark 6:14 – 29 and or Memorize: 1 Timothy 6:6 NLT

I know I don't have much status up here in Gaul, but will you do me the favor of listening to me. I've had a lot of time to think in these years I've been in exile. I want to share my conclusions with someone.

My name is Herod. The problem is my family is so extended, and so many people bear that name, that I should really use my given name, Antipas. My circumstances should be different. It's not that Lyons is so bad, but I was used too much more luxury when I was Tetrarch of Galilee. All that has been taken from me, and I am consigned to the fringes of the empire.

My family exercised great power in Palestine for many years. My father, Herod the Great, was called King of the Jews, but He wasn't a Jew. He was an Idumean. My mother was a Samaritan. So, although I ruled part of Judea, I didn't have a drop of Jewish blood. Your Bible calls me a king, but I only ruled over one quarter of Galilee, not much of a kingdom, that's why I was the Tetrarch

My father's second will named me his successor but, his final will gave the kingdom to my brother, Archelaus, along with the provinces of Judea and Samaria. Another half-brother, Philip, was made ruler of Trachonitus and I was made Tetrarch of Galilee. I contested that, but Ceasar upheld that will and that was where I landed up.

I made the best of it, including trying to suck up to Ceasar by building a wall around Sepphoris. I built the city of Tiberius, naming it after the emperor. I then built another city named, Livias, after the emperor's wife. I built a fortress for myself near the Dead Sea. Reflecting on that I have much to say to you.

My first lesson is: "Control your passions." I married a Nabatean princess. In year 35 of the current era, I went to Rome to visit my brother, I should say, my half-brother, Philip, who was living as a private citizen in Rome. His wife, Herodias, also his niece, was my hostess.

She entertained me lavishly, and passionately, if you get what I mean. In fact, I should say I was so enamored of her, that our passions overtook our senses. I seduced her and persuaded her to divorce my brother. My problem was I was still married, so I divorced my

current wife, so I could marry her. This is not uncommon in Rome, but not in Galilee. That she was my niece made it even more unacceptable. It is against Jewish law to marry your brother's wife while he is still living. I didn't feel bound by Jewish law.

When I returned to Galilee, I sent my wife packing. She complained to her father, who attacked my country. I would've lost everything I had, had I not appealed to the Romans to intervene. The attack brought great suffering to my people and produced much unrest. I had allowed my passions to take control of me, and they were leading me into difficulty.

The second lesson I would offer is: "Be considerate of critics." Remember, there was that strange preacher, John the Baptist, in my land. I was interested in hearing what he had to say so I invited him to my palace for an audience.

He had the audacity to point his finger at me and tell me that I was wrong to have married my brother's wife. I was ambivalent about him. On the one hand, I didn't like the criticism. On the other hand, it was refreshing to hear somebody speak courageously to me.

Herodias, however, didn't like what he was saying. Maybe she thought I would pack her up and send her back to Rome, but I would never do that. She said he was a menace. The people heard him gladly and thought of him as a messiah or prophet. My wife pointed out to me that he would lead the people in a rebellion against me, if I didn't do something about him.

Because of her demand, I mean request, I had John arrested and placed in prison. She wanted me to kill him, but I said no. In fact, I gave orders that he was not be harmed. Periodically, I sent for him. In listening to my critic, I think I was doing the right thing. I recommend it to you also. Unfortunately, in my situation, that's not how it ended.

Another lesson I would offer is: "Be careful with promises." On one of my birthdays, I was holding a celebration in my fortress. I invited various officers, courtiers and leaders in Galilee. Herodias was present. The food was wonderful and the wine flowed. She announced that her daughter, Salome, my great-niece and step-daughter would dance for me and my guests.

In itself, this was unusual. Such dances were often very suggestive and provocative. They were typically done by women of questionable backgrounds. For a young woman to do such a thing was unheard of. But we were quite under the "influence."

She was 17 and well-endowed. She knew how to captivate a man. The audience was quite impressed and offered her many compliments. I wanted to outdo all of them. I didn't intend it to come out this way, but I impetuously offered her anything she wanted in the kingdom up to half of it.

She asked her mother what she should ask for. Her mother said John the Baptist's head on a platter. She came back and asked for it in front of all my guests. I didn't want to do this, but she had taken advantage of me. It was important that my guests see me as a person who kept his word, so I ordered a soldier to go to the dungeon and return with John's head, which he did. I quickly learned the importance of being careful with promises.

Another lesson I would offer is: "Be prepared for the power of conscience." A person in power has to make many decisions. Some he doesn't want to make. Then in the wee hours they come back to haunt him. I experienced that over and over again with that order to kill the Baptist.

Not long after his death, I heard about another itinerant preacher named Jesus was in the land. He was attracting attention. When I inquired, some people said He was another prophet of old. The people listened to him because they wanted to hear an authentic word from God. Some said He was Elijah. Others said He was John the Baptist, raised from the dead. I believe that my conscience was already troubling me, because I had a person executed who did not deserve it.

I told my soldiers, I wanted to see Jesus, but He alluded them. Some reported to me that when the people told Him of my desire to see Him, Jesus referred to me as the Fox. I didn't get to see Him at this time, but His presence kept my conscience in turmoil. If you make an unpleasant decision, you better be prepared for the same experience.

The next lesson I would offer is: "Be cautious about making judgments in areas that are not your business." Much later, I was in Jerusalem at the Passover. Jesus had been arrested and taken to Pilate for judgment. Pilate was being pressured by the Jewish authorities to find Jesus guilty in some matter of Jewish law.

As a Roman, he apparently did not want to judge Him. Pilate was looking for a way out. When he discovered He was a Galilean, it gave him the perfect out. He said he should be judged by the ruler of Galilee and sent him to my palace.

I was glad to get the opportunity to meet Jesus. Pilate was hoping that I would pass judgment on Him, but after I interviewed Him, and satisfied myself that He was not John the Baptist, I sent Him back to Pilate with no recommendation from me.

This did change one thing. Previously, Pilate and I had not gotten along, but his acknowledging me made me appear more important, than I was. From that time on Pilate and I got along much better.

One final lesson, perhaps the costliest of my life, that I would pass on is "Practice contentment." My half-brother Philip, who governed the area north of me, died. I thought perhaps I could add his province to my area but the new Emperor, Caligula gave the province to Agrippa, who happened to be Herodias' brother. He became known as a king. Which galled my wife, no end. She could not leave it alone. All she did, day after day, was complain to me and cry.

She wanted to be called a queen. She continually urged me to go to Rome to offer the emperor money for the title of King. She said we should take lots of money and be prepared to spend whatever it took to get the title. "The purpose of money is to make us happy," she said, and it was apparent that she would never be happy until she had the title of Queen. Reluctantly, I gave in and we went to Rome.

In the meantime, Herodias' brother, Agrippa, concerned about our intentions, sent messages to the emperor, stating that I was unworthy. He also suggested that I was in league with the Parthians, long-time enemies of Rome, and planning an insurrection with them.

The emperor believed him, took our money, took away our provinces and sent us into exile in France. Obviously, I had overstepped my bounds. I should've been more content with what I had. My advice to you therefore, is to be slow to push for recognition, do your job in the best way you can and be content.

Perhaps you think that what I have told you only applies to rulers, such as myself. I would urge you to consider that these lessons are applicable to everyone. I urge you to take them to heart. Control your passions, give consideration to criticism, be careful with promises, be prepared to deal with your conscience, be cautious about making judgments and practice contentment.

Perhaps the best thing that I can say to you is to have my life be a lesson for you. Don't make the same mistakes I made. You never know how your life will be impacted if you fail to take wisdom into account. And if you need a reminder of this, just look at me. I am in exile and unsure what the emperor will do with me next.

Count me in: Like Herod, how has Jesus' wisdom impacted your life?