

He Had Been Wanting to See Jesus

Luke 23:6-12 - Lent 4

So tell me, have you every tried to keep track of the number of hours a week you spend watching TV? 5, 10, 25, 50, more? Who would've ever imagined that a people with as much freedom and as much money as we have would dedicate so many hours every week to watching a box with moving pictures? The same point could apply to the Internet, iPhones, androids and other electronic devices. It's ironic how important entertainment is to us in general. But people with time and money often struggle to fill the hours of their days. This year during Lent, we're focusing on the **ironies of the passion**. Tonight, Herod Antipas, a man who could do almost anything he wanted, had an unfulfilled desire for entertainment: **He had been wanting to see Jesus.**

Luke says, *"From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort."* Jesus called sinners to **repentance**, and then he warmed their hearts with God's **forgiving love**. Jesus' preaching made the crowds hang on his every word. This is the Jesus **Herod had been wanting to see but he only hoped to see a miracle.**

First let's identify which Herod we're talking about. King Herod the Great ruled when Jesus was born. He's the one the wise men came to see. He murdered the children around Bethlehem. He died soon after that. This man was his son, Herod Antipas. This Herod only ruled Galilee and a territory across the Jordan River called Perea. His brother, Archelaus, had reuled in Jerusalem for ten years, but the Romans tossed him out and put in a governor - Pontius Pilate.

Even though he didn't rule there, this Herod, Herod Antipas, had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. While he was there, one of his political rivals, Pontius Pilate, sent a

famous prisoner to him: Jesus. Luke tells us that Herod was delighted because for a long time **he had wanted to see Jesus**. Understand, Herod Antipas had engineered the downfall of his brother Archelaus. He had married one wife and then replaced her with his niece—who was already married to one of his younger brothers. Then, when John the Baptist had accused him of adultery, Herod threw him in prison and later killed him. This was the man who **wanted to see Jesus!**

Now, by itself that wouldn't be ironic, because Jesus did come to reclaim sinners. But Herod didn't want to see Jesus so that his **guilty conscience** could have **peace**. He had another reason. You see, Herod hadn't really wanted to execute John the Baptist. He liked listening to him, even though he didn't understand John's preaching. His new wife, however, hated John. When her daughter danced for Herod and pleased him so much that he swore to give her anything she asked for, her mother persuaded her to ask for John's head on a platter. Herod complied. However, at that time, Jesus began to become even more famous than John had been. Herod concluded that Jesus must be John the Baptist come back from the dead. Ever since that time, Herod had been **trying to see Jesus**—not because he was sorry for what he had done—but because he **wanted to see the miracle worker** who could even come back from the dead. What an incredible waste! The one person, who could've made a difference in the life of this blood-thirsty, power-hungry man, was standing before him, and all Herod wanted were magic tricks!

That shouldn't surprise us. People with freedom and money are often bored easily. Why do you think TV and sports and video games are billion-dollar industries? It's the nature of sinful man to be restless and discontent. The newest, best

thing that would ever come was standing before Herod. The Almighty God stood before him in that body that was already bruised and bloodied—in that body that would be dead before that day was over. And Herod completely missed it.

God had come and He continues to come. Do we see him (tonight)? Do we see him in **his Word**? Do we see him when we celebrate the **Lord's Supper**? Are we satisfied with the greatest miracle in all of history, or do we want something else when we come to church? Do we think church should be **more entertaining**? Are we like spoiled children who want to be wowed and awed and spoon-fed? The truth is, being Jesus' disciple is work! It takes **discipline** to pay attention in church. It takes **commitment** to study the Scriptures and grow and understand the difference between the gospel of Jesus Christ and what society today passes off as spirituality. We live in a culture that has too much **wealth**, too much free **time**, and too many **entertainment opportunities** that compete with listening to the simple truths of God's Word. Can we say that we are much different than Herod?

We have **no defense** for hearts that aren't committed to hearing the Word of God. We can make **no excuse** for minds that wander and wish we could be doing something more entertaining. Even though there have been many times when we were happy to hear God's Word, we haven't been perfect. If God would play the recording of our hearts on judgment day, the only verdict he could render is **guilty**—guilty of wanting to be **spoon-fed**, guilty of wanting to **see miracles**, guilty of **disengaging our minds and hearts** over and over again. The punishment for guilt is hell.

God, however, is not going to make those charges on judgment day. Instead, He will declare that for every moment of our lives, we were totally and completely committed to

hearing, learning, and living according to his Word. God will announce that because Jesus has **taken our sins away**. That's the irony of Jesus standing before to Herod. The spoiled prince thought he had power over the Son of God—but it only seemed that way. Jesus let all this happen to him so that he could carry our sins to the cross. There Jesus paid for Herod and he paid for each of us. We stand before God **forgiven**.

One of the ironies about the entertainment culture we live in is that we often make mindless entertainment more important than things we really care about. A former missionary in our synod told the story of the first year he and his wife were married. The only TV programs they had were in Spanish, because they were living in South America. But they didn't speak enough Spanish yet to understand them. So they spent many evenings playing games and talking. That missionary thought they lost something when television assumed a greater role in their lives. It's easy for a thing like TV to eclipse the spouse we treasured on our wedding day. Herod's sin blinded him. He put entertainment ahead of the gift God gave the world. **Herod had been wanting to see Jesus for entertainment, while God wanted to show him his Savior.**

Luke says, "*He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.*" While Herod was trying to enjoy his prisoner, the leaders of the Jews were there "*vehemently accusing him.*" They were trying to distract Herod. The worst thing they could imagine was Jesus doing a miracle and getting Herod on his side. But Jesus had no intention of showing Herod any miracles that day. So when Herod didn't get what he wanted he and his soldiers mocked Jesus. They hung a royal robe over his shoulders and insulted him. And then Herod sent Jesus away without ever understanding he had been speaking to the Son of God and Savior of the world..

Jesus didn't have to **hold his tongue** when his enemies launched those vehement accusations. He didn't have to **let** this Roman puppet and his pagan soldiers abuse and insult him. He could easily have defended himself. However, because Jesus loves us, he allowed this petty king to abuse him and then send him back to Pilate. This was all **another step to the cross** for him and **to life** for us. Unfortunately, Herod never saw that and neither did Pontius Pilate, who had sent Jesus to him hoping to get rid of a political headache. Neither man made a real effort to understand who Jesus really was. So both men missed their Savior that day.

The sad thing is that both men thought there was a silver lining to their bad day. Before this, they had been enemies. However, when Pilate sent Jesus to him, Herod finally got to see the miracle worker. Even though it turned out to be a big bust from his perspective, it wasn't Pilate's fault. Pilate didn't get rid of his problem either. He still had to judge Jesus. He still had to weigh his political future against doing what he knew justice demanded. That day Herod and Pilate became friends. What irony. They thought that **becoming friends** was the best thing that happened to them on the day **Jesus died** to take away their sins!

Jesus stood in our place. **He was mocked** so that God won't mock us in hell. He **refused to defend himself** so that we won't have to defend ourselves on judgment day. Jesus went to the cross for everyone, even for Herod and Pilate and the priests who were accusing him. When that day was done, every sin of every believer and even of every unbeliever was paid for. That means **our sins** were paid in full. We are **forgiven**. We **belong to Jesus**. In God's House we hear that message. The heart of our **fellowship**, the source of our **love for one another**, is hearing about that forgiveness. Through that gospel of forgiveness, God creates feelings of friendship

and comfort. That is the good news that bonds us together!

We Americans have more freedom and wealth than any nation in history. But there's a **greater freedom** than our civic freedoms. There's a **greater wealth** than our money. We Christians are **free** from the power of sin and the threat of hell. We are **rich** with the promise of eternal life. What will we do with that freedom? What will we do with that wealth? On our own, we could only waste it—wishing for entertainment, searching vainly for something new, constantly looking for fellowship in all the wrong places. But we are not on our own. God has called us by the gospel. He's given us faith. Through that gospel, he teaches us to treasure these rich gifts. By God's power, we want to see Jesus and we do in His Holy Word and blessed Sacraments. Be sure that is always where you **want to see Jesus**. Amen.