

Year C, Lent 2, 2/24/13
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Hope Central Church
"Beyond Right and Wrong"

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

Jesus said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 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.'

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Luke 13:31-35

On Saturday, February 23, 2013, a member of our congregation died, Vivian Reilly. For years, Vivian was a part of the leadership of Central Congregational Church, before it merged with Hope Church to become Hope Central. In the three years I've know Vivian, she has been the head of the kitchen, and with others, made sure there was a fulsome coffee hour after every morning church service.

I've got some red high top converse tennis shoes, and I don't know about you, but if someone told me that I'd better run because Herod was out to kill me, I'd be looking down to see if my shoes were tied, and run away.

But what I wish I'd do if someone threatened me with death, what I'd like to do is what Jesus did, and really, what Vivian did when she found out she had only six months to live – both Vivian and Jesus said, you tell that death that I have some things to do.

In our scripture this morning, you hear that Jesus said to tell that fox Herod, an insult of competence in those days, and not a back handed compliment of wiliness and cunning that it is in the western world. You tell that fox Herod that I have some things to do, I've got some healing to do today and tomorrow, then maybe on the third day, I'll be off to see what I'll be on my way.

This story of Jesus is a different story from Vivian's story. Herod was no awful disease, he was a murderer. Jesus knew that Herod had it in for him, that he'd been threatening to snatch up Jesus' life and snuff it out. Herod did behead John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, yes he did. And you better believe that Jesus knew Herod just might do the same to him.

You might say that Herod had a little unhealed personality disorder, or a big unhealed one – his rapacious appetite for murder and robbery was insatiable – he was corrupted entirely, utterly, and though he was a Jew, he had no sympathy for his fellow Jews, stripped of land and dignity – no, he had only regard for himself – and this Jesus must have known well.

Herod sounds to me like King Baby – do you know this term, or do you have a King Baby in your life? For you who don't understand this term, King Baby, it refers to a person in an alcoholic system, probably, mostly likely the alcoholic himself or herself, but not always, a person around whom all others in the system run from or stand up to, or stand up to and then run, because there is no way to know what if anything will appeal to King Baby's reason, kindness, mercy or insight. King Baby leads with fury and rage, but also with wheedling manipulation and mayhem. Often, if King Baby displays reason, kindness, mercy or insight, it would be only for the purpose of smashing your heart, which King Baby would do to get what he or she needs. King Baby is so named because he acts like a king, but really is a baby, with no ability to interact with the world in cooperative ways. King Baby is skilled only in trying to get King Baby's needs met, often the need of a drink, the need of some satiation, and my guess is, always to bring relief from some unfelt feeling, some hole of need not met in childhood or since.

We can have compassion on King Baby, because probably there was a King Baby in King Baby's life, one unable to see the need of a little baby, perhaps.

I know such a woman, who's desperate need to be seen created a little kingdom where competition for affection and acclamation is most always won by her. She is competitive for affection and therefore is overly critical with her children, colleagues, and partner. Because she makes the rules and the rules change always to benefit her, no one wins, but everyone dies trying to control her or themselves, always thinking of her and never of themselves, always preparing to deal with her behavior. All the energy around this woman I know goes only one way, toward the hole of her wound.

This is Herod, King Baby.

The spiritual disease of racism is a King Baby – it wants to only save itself, not caring who is chewed up while getting its way, the rules of who gets what change as whiteness needs them to change. We all lose to the King Baby of racism - people identified with their whiteness lose our moral compass. People of color endure the thousand cuts of racism, sometimes even unto death.

It seems to me, too, the way we use earth's resources regardless of the sustainability of water, fuels, clean air, especially here in the US, makes us King Babies, don't you think?

More subtle to me, is the King Baby of our assumptions about what is right – so many of us, liberals or progressives define ourselves against gun toters, pro-lifers, suburban drivers or just suburbanites, and we understand ourselves to be more right – and we read or watch only what agrees with us except for reading and watching what the other side does that so egregiously wrong that we are assured our the sanctity of our positions.

Did you know our beloved Vivian was a Republican?

We are so concerned with the King Baby of getting it right, being on the right side of people's affection, the right side of loyalty, the side that has no conflict, we are so busy trying to force outcomes, do things ourselves, trying to be better, trying so hard to be

God that we have totally missed that only God is God, and that there is a field there beyond right doing and wrong doing where God is – a field where you are welcome to get on with the work that is your spiritual purpose on behalf of the community, instead of lining oneself up with King Baby, a field where Jesus is healing folks today, tomorrow, and a third day.

Here we have our Lenten theme, “beyond right doing and wrong doing, there is a field,” writes Sufi poet Rumi, “join me there.”

Rumi, a Muslim says it so well, and Jesus, our example lives there beyond right and wrong, neither engaging Herod’s chaos not running from it – there Jesus stands doing his spiritual work of healing today, tomorrow, and the next day.

Five or six weeks ago, after Vivian had had her diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, and decided to die on her own terms, she handed me this little packet – so like Vivian, and in it was a piece of cloth she asked to have put in her casket, a bulletin from the second Sunday in Lent, 1999, and a reflection she wrote on that second Sunday of Lent, 1999. Vivian asked me if I would read it to the congregation on the second Sunday in Lent, this year. I said I would read part of it, not knowing that she would die one day before the day she requested. Vivian writes,

I'm sure I gave up something every year [when I was a teenager] chocolates, radio shows later TV, and what ever young girls sacrificed in their teen years. I recall more vividly after became a member [of Central Church] in 1947 the preparation for Easter Sunday, the very early sunrise services in the Arboretum and afterward the breakfast serviced in the church - girls particularly in curls and kerchiefs waiting to overwhelm the boys by their Easter beauty at the church service.

As my lifestyle changed through marriage and birth of five children so did my thoughts as Lent came each year. I'm not sure when I began to think of those 40 days as my own of reflection, but it probably was because my birthday was in March and it wasn't and I wasn't getting any younger, but I began to look back and sort of smell the roses so to speak, and appreciated, more than Thanksgiving, all the blessings I have received due to the fact somebody, somewhere up there cared for me.

Not that I won any lottery money, but I did notice the simple acts extended to me like a driver holding up his lane of traffic so I can turn left, or a grocery line customer letting me go ahead because I only had two or three items. Little things which showed others not known to me, were aware of my existence and I in turn discovered small ways to acknowledge to others I knew they were alive. . . . I may never be the good Samaritan Jesus talks about or be a brother's keeper but my way to the hereafter will be lit though dimly by deeds I've done simply because I was in the right spot right time.

Although I fear I shall always be at the shadow of the Christian efforts others Central Church members have accomplished, there is the consoling realization that being in the shade is not a health hazard.

Here it is, beloved, the shade in the field beyond being first, getting it right, or horribly wrong, that shade in that field beyond right and wrong is not only **not** a health hazard, it is the place to meet God – to meet others who choose serenity, who choose to heal in Jesus' case, or to feed the people in Vivian's case.

The Herods, the Kingbabies of this world never have our spiritual interests at heart, and so we pray for them – we ask God to watch for them, to provide healing for them, but then we step into that place where our spiritual work can be done. We are seeking spiritual freedom under the shade in the field that is the Kingdom of God.