

I thought I had this sermon written last week. I was really excited to get a little ahead—so I could start focusing on other projects. It seemed like a great sermon—a little funny—as I recall, and the driving image in it was Moxie.

Then I made the mistake of reading it to my daughter.

She said, “I have absolutely no idea what on earth you were talking about in that sermon. Honestly I have no idea what the main idea even is!”

That is not a good sign.

I tried to explain what I was going for. She wasn’t buying it.

She said—somewhat sternly-- “You’re trying to preach an apolitical sermon when the gospel reading is in fact a highly charged political statement—cut that out!”

I am well aware that people don’t want to me to preach about politics.

But it’s going to be hard to avoid, with this reading. The gospels are full of Jesus taking on the political system. My daughter’s right about that.

Well--I’m not going to take on our political system—you can all breathe a sigh of relief—but I am going to talk about why the political system and Jesus were at odds.

So here we go.

Last week we heard the story about Jesus taking his ministry to the next level and encouraging his disciples to share the power that Jesus had demonstrated over and over again. He could heal, teach and love--- but they were equally capable—they could do it too. He sent them out to discover their own power.

Directly on the heels of Jesus sending out the disciples, we hear the story about Herod.

This is Herod’s **only** appearance in the gospel of Mark. Jesus doesn’t appear before Herod during the crucifixion in this Gospel. The weird thing about Mark’s version of this story is that everyone in this reading is named Herod—or Herodias—the female version of Herod.

First, we have Herod. Herod is a king. He is only interested in himself and what he wants, he rules by intimidation and fear, and he lives to impress the wealthy and those in power around him.

Herod has heard about this Jesus- and he thinks Jesus is John reincarnated. He feared John--but couldn't stop listening to what he had to say. John was outspoken against Herod because Herod married his brother's wife—while the brother was still alive. John vilified Herod publically because Herod said he was a man of faith, but he didn't behave accordingly. Herod claimed to lead the Jews, but he broke Jewish law when it suited him. And John called him on it.

Next, we have Herodius – the wife—she wants revenge on John because he dared to tell speak out about what she and her husband were doing.

Finally, there is the daughter Herodius – raised in a corrupt household, who takes advantage of her stepfather's boasting to win the approval of her mother by killing her mother's enemy.

Three Herods—all three taking the name of Herod, all three ruling by money and fear. They could symbolize the corrupt political power in the world, that finds itself threatened by Jesus' message of love and justice that could potentially empower the masses.

These stories of Herod and of Jesus describe *parallel* paths.

- Herod's path leads to power for one ruler.
- Jesus' path empowers everyone.

- Herod's greatness comes by ruling through fear.
- Jesus' teaches that greatness is a gift from God, and all people are blessed with it.

So both of these parallel paths lead to power. Both paths lead to greatness. But one path is a solitary one, and the other welcomes everyone.

- Herod is trying to get to a place of personal wealth.
- Jesus understands that wealth isn't found in things, but in each other. And within ourselves.
- One path sees enemies everywhere. Those who walk it try desperately to keep certain people out.
- The parallel path welcomes everyone---from everywhere, no matter who they are, or what they've done—everyone is welcome on the path.

So those are the first two stories in a three part narrative: Jesus sending us out, and Herod's killing of a prophet. The final story in this narrative is the feeding of the 5000. It's coming up next. It's as if the writer of the Gospel of Mark, by describing two alternative paths, is trying to show us that only one of them has the potential to feed the multitudes.

We always have these paths in front of us. We always have the power to walk down the road of our choice.

That is the danger, and that is the Glory. It's always been our choice.

One path is built by fear.

The other----- requires Moxie.