

## I.N.I.

Third Sunday in Lent  
Luke 23:6-12  
March 4, 2018

In Christ Jesus, our Savior, whom we see through eyes of faith, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I read this the other day. "If you had your choice of participating in any activity available within a day's drive of our church, what would you do? Go skiing? Go to a ball game? Visit a museum? How about staring at a box with moving pictures? How many hours a week do you spend watching TV? 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? And the same point could apply to surfing the Internet."

It's one of the great ironies of our time. It's ironic how important entertainment has become to us in general. What does it say about the time we have available to us? But that isn't new. Even from medieval times, people with money and freedom have always struggled to fill the hours of their days with entertainment.

This year during Lent, we're focusing on the ironies of the passion. Today we heard about, Herod Antipas, a man who could do almost anything he wanted, but had an unfulfilled desire for entertainment:

**HE HAD BEEN WANTING TO SEE JESUS  
LUKE SAYS, NOW WHEN HEROD SAW JESUS, HE WAS EXCEEDINGLY  
GLAD; FOR HE HAD DESIRED FOR A LONG TIME TO SEE HIM, BECAUSE HE  
HAD HEARD MANY THINGS ABOUT HIM, AND HE HOPED TO SEE SOME  
MIRACLE DONE BY HIM.**

Jesus led prostitutes and tax collectors to repent, and then He proclaimed God's forgiving love to them. Jesus' preaching made the crowds hang on His every word. When He was only 12 years old, Jesus amazed the teachers of the law with His knowledge of God's Word. But:

**Herod had been wanting to see Jesus.**

**I: Because he hoped to see a miracle.**

This is not the same Herod the Great who ruled when Jesus was born. He's the one King of Judea who the wise men came to see. He is the one who murdered the children around Bethlehem. He died soon after that. This man was his son, Herod Antipas. Antipas only ruled Galilee, the northern part of Israel and a territory across the Jordan River called Perea. His brother, Archelaus, had reigned in Jerusalem for ten years after his father died, but the Romans removed him and put in a governor. At this time, the governor was Pontius Pilate.

Even though he didn't rule in Jerusalem, Herod Antipas had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover since he was a Jew. While he was there, one of his political rivals, the Roman 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. Remember this Herod had married his brother's wife, Herodias. Then, when John the Baptist had

accused him of adultery, Herod threw John in prison and later killed him. Herod was not a nice man. He was like his father, quite cruel. Yet he wanted to see Jesus!

Now, by itself that wouldn't be ironic, because Jesus did come to save sinners, even evil men like Herod. But Herod didn't want to see Jesus so that his guilty conscience could have peace and so he could be forgiven. He had another reason. Herod hadn't really wanted to execute John the Baptist. He liked listening to him, even though we are told 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, shortly after that, Jesus began to become even more famous than John had been. Herod believed 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 spiritual difference in the life of this blood-thirsty, power-hungry, cruel man was about to stand before him, and all Herod wanted were magic tricks!

But that shouldn't surprise us. People with freedom and money get bored very easily and look in many different places for their entertainment. Why do you think TV, movies, casinos, sports and video games are billion-dollar industries? It's the nature of sinful man to be restless and discontent. Here was the best thing that would ever come into this world standing before Herod. Never before in the history of the world had God come in human flesh and blood. But God hid His glory and power in the body of the Man who stood bound before Herod. Yet it was almighty God, the Son who stood there in that body that was already beaten, bruised and bloodied—in that body that would be dead before that day was over. And Herod completely missed it.

God had come. God has come. Do we see Him today? 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, something more when we come to church? Do we think church should be more entertaining? Do we want to be wowed and awed? The truth is, being Jesus' followers is work! It takes discipline to pay attention in church. It takes commitment and time to study God's Word and to grow and understand the difference between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and what our society passes off as spirituality and religion. We live in a culture that has too much wealth, too much free time, and too many entertainment opportunities and options that compete with listening to the simple truths of God's Word read and preached. Are we turning into Herods?

We have no defense if we have hearts that aren't committed to hearing the Word of God. We have no excuse if our minds wander and we wish we could be doing something more entertaining. Even though there have been many times when we were moved by God's Word, we haven't been perfect. If God would

play the recording of our hearts and minds even on Sunday, even in church, the only verdict He could render is guilty—guilty of wanting something else, guilty of wanting to see miracles, guilty of wandering minds and hearts over and over again. And the punishment for guilt is hell.

Thank God that He is not going to play that tape. God is not going to review our sins from Sunday or Monday or any day and judge us guilty on Judgment Day. Instead, God is going to declare that we are righteous in Christ. It is as if we never let our minds wander here. God is going to declare that for every moment of our lives, we were totally and completely committed to hearing, learning, and living according to His Word perfectly. Why will God issue that decree? Because Jesus has paid for and taken away all of our sins.

That's the irony of Jesus standing next to Herod. This nasty ruler 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, and Herod's sins to the cross. There Jesus paid for them all. If He paid for Herod, He paid for us. God has forgiven us, even for our discontented, disengaged hearts and minds.

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 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 Spanish well enough yet to understand them and enjoy them. So they spent many evenings playing games and talking to each other. That missionary said they lost something when later the television assumed a greater role in their lives. Herod's sin blinded him. He put entertainment ahead of the gift God gave the world.

**Herod had been wanting to see Jesus.**

**II: But God wanted to show him his Savior.**

Luke says, **THEN HE QUESTIONED HIM WITH MANY WORDS BUT HE (JESUS) ANSWERED HIM NOTHING.** Herod thought Jesus could answer all the hard questions, perform amazing miracles, be a wizard or magician, but Jesus wouldn't play the game. 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 they need not have worried. Jesus had no intention of showing off, of doing any miracles for Herod that day. So Herod did what all spoiled children do when they get bored. 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 what he had missed and to whom he had been really speaking.

Jesus didn't have to hold His tongue when His enemies accused Him. He didn't have to let this evil ruler and his soldiers abuse and insult Him. If He had offered a defense, no one would have blamed Him. But since Jesus loves us, He allowed this man to abuse Him, to mock 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 seeing their Savior that day.

The sad thing is that both men thought there was a silver lining to that wasted 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. But now he could say Herod also found no fault in Jesus. Herod at the least hadn't made him look any worse to the Jews. So they put aside their differences. What irony. They thought that was the best thing that happened to them on the day Jesus died to take away their sins! Becoming friends to each other, but not becoming friends with God.

Are we ever like these men? Do we ever walk away from this building thinking the best thing that happened here was that we got to see some people we like, visit with fellow Christians? Are we ever disappointed because we don't have enough exciting activities or we just don't feel close to other members? Do we ever think about leaving this congregation because we feel all alone? God certainly does want us to love one another here and express that love with each other. But even if we never get real close to other members and even if we never quite feel completely comfortable here, God still shows us Jesus here, shows us His love in our Savior, Christ.

Yes! Because Jesus stood in our place, He was accused, beaten and abused so that we won't be accused, beaten and abused by God. He refused to defend Himself so that we won't have to defend ourselves on Judgment Day. Jesus went to the cross even for Herod and Pilate, the priests and scribes who were accusing him. When that day was done, every sin of every believer and even of every unbeliever was paid for. *Our sins were paid for!*

In the Gospel, the Holy Spirit proclaims Jesus to us. Now we are free. We are forgiven. We belong to Jesus. This is the place where we hear that, where we see that through faith. The heart of our fellowship, the source of our love for one another, is Jesus, and the hearing about that love and forgiveness He earned for us in His Word. Through that Gospel of forgiveness, God creates friendship, companionship, compassion and forgiveness to each other. Thank God we continue to hear that good news 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 money. We Christians are free from the power of sin and damnation in hell. We Christians 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 would only waste it—looking for empty entertainment, searching vainly for something new, squandering our days. 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, only Jesus, and in His Word we do see Jesus, for the right reason.

Amen.