

**IN THE KING'S PRESENCE**  
**Sermon, February 21, 2016**  
**The Second Sunday in Lent**  
**Texts: Luke 9:7-9, 13:31-35, 23:1-12**

We left off last week at verse 13 of Luke Chapter 4. After the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus returned to Galilee and we are told in verse 14 (*which we didn't read this morning*) that "... news about Him spread through the whole country." Later in the same chapter, Jesus cast out a demon, and Luke notes in verse 37, "... and the news about Him spread throughout the area." When Luke tells us the story of Jesus in the gospel he penned, he stresses that Jesus' popularity spread quickly throughout the land. Chapter 5, Jesus heals a paralytic in front of a large group of Pharisees and teachers of the law, who, Luke tells us, "... had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem." Chapter 7, Jesus comes upon a funeral procession for a man in the town of Nain; Jesus sees this man's grieving mother who had also been recently widowed; Jesus has compassion on her, and stops the funeral procession by raising her son from the dead. Yes, you can be sure that sort of thing would bring a funeral procession to a halt. The people who saw this exclaimed, "A great prophet has appeared among us!" Luke adds, "This news about Jesus spread throughout all Judea and the surrounding country." According to Luke, just about everyone was talking about the amazing acts of Jesus.

Now, this isn't hard to believe. Jesus taught like nobody had taught before. Not only did He teach, but He could also cast out evil, He could heal the sick, and He can even raise the dead. Yes, news of a man who could do all that would travel pretty fast and pretty far. I don't think there was a single person alive (then or now, for that matter) who wouldn't want to meet a man who could cast out evil, heal the sick, raise the dead ... because every single human being has this in common: ALL of us have something we would like fixed or healed; ALL of us have some evil infecting our lives or the lives of those we love that we would love to have confronted and cast out, and I'm sure all of us have at least one dearly departed special person missing from our lives we would love to have back with us again. Yes, news of a man who could do all that would travel pretty fast and pretty far. In fact, the news has even traveled over two thousand years to our ears, as well. We, too, have heard the reports of the amazing acts and teachings of Jesus.

Now, wouldn't you love to have seen just one of these miracles? Just one? Wouldn't it be great to not have to rely on simply what you've heard about Jesus? Well, we're not the only ones who missed the miracles and had to rely on the testimony of others. Luke 9:7, "Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on, and he was perplexed ... and he tried to see Him." King Herod never got to see Jesus; he never saw a single miracle performed by Jesus. Maybe the king thought if an invitation was issued for Jesus to come to the palace that Jesus would jump at the chance to come and perform for a royal audience and maybe even have some influence in the halls of power. But Jesus wasn't much interested in performing for Herod. Jesus wasn't interested in performing for anybody. Jesus' miracles were always and only signs of His primary calling to bring lasting healing and hope to the human soul. Herod wasn't exactly looking for someone to heal his soul. John the Baptist tried to speak to Herod's soul, and when he did so, he was imprisoned for his troubles and later beheaded. You know the story; John was jailed and beheaded because he openly criticized Herod's morality (or lack thereof). Herod's way of dealing with theological or moral opposition was to shut the opposition up. So in Luke 13, when some of the Pharisees tried to tell Jesus that the king was looking for him, the Pharisees assumed it was because Herod wanted to kill Jesus as well.

In Luke 23, Herod finally gets to see Jesus. Jesus is now standing in the presence of King Herod; he is standing for what is essentially His third trial. He was tried first by the religious leaders, and then by Pontius Pilate. Pilate was uneasy with this trial for a man who was clearly innocent, so when he learned Herod was visiting in Jerusalem, Pilate thought he could get out of this situation by shipping Jesus over to Herod. So now, finally, Herod gets to meet Jesus face to face. We are told in verse 8 that Herod was greatly pleased, "... because for a long time he had been wanting to see Jesus." Some today might even call Herod a "seeker," because this was a man searching for Jesus, hoping to see Jesus, for a long time. But not everyone supposedly looking for Jesus is looking for Jesus the Savior and/or Jesus the Lord. Herod wasn't looking for Jesus the Savior. Herod was a wealthy political leader who saw no need to seek forgiveness of God or anybody; he didn't think he needed a savior. Nor was Herod seeking Jesus the Lord. Herod is king; he is going to live life as he sees fit. Nor does Herod bring his deep questions and the serious longings of his heart to Jesus. No, verse 8 ends "... he hoped to see him perform some miracle." That's all he wanted. He just wanted Jesus to perform for him. "Okay, Jesus, I've been looking for you for a long time. OK, I'm ready. Do something spectacular." Some of you may remember Herod's song from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, with the character

portraying Herod singing, “So if you are the Christ, You’re the great Jesus Christ, Prove to me that You’re no fool! Walk across my swimming pool! If You do that for me then I’ll let you go free. C’mon, King of the Jews!”<sup>1</sup>

But Jesus stood silent. As Jesus stood there in the presence of King Herod ... or, as rightly seen through the eyes of faith, as Herod stood there in the presence of King Jesus ... Herod had an opportunity to make the ultimate choice of his life. He could choose to treat Jesus as the king He was. Of course, Herod didn’t see that. The one he had been looking for was right here in front of him. But because Jesus didn’t perform for him as Herod thought He should, Herod missed his moment, and he sends Jesus away. No, King Herod. Jesus isn’t to perform for us. **He** is the king, and if anything, we are to be faithful in our performance before him “... with hearts that yield Him glad behavior,”<sup>2</sup> as we sang earlier.

One of the privileges of ministry is being with people who don’t miss their moment, like many of you here this morning. Even when the miracles aren’t forthcoming, these people choose to place their faith and trust in the Savior and King in Whose royal presence they know *they* stand. Yes, they may ask Jesus to perform for them, but they do so humbly, in faith, fully understanding that He is the king whose ways are not always going to be our ways. They live to “perform” for Him, even if He seems to remain silent in their crisis. I have been in the hospital room right after the doctor explained the disease had spread too far, that there was nothing more that could be done, and the person in the hospital bed doesn’t want to “send Jesus away;” he wants to pray in the name of Jesus with me. I have been with people facing overwhelming difficulties caused by marital discord, people who have been swindled by people they trusted and are now facing financial ruin, people who faced loss of health, people who faced turmoil in their children’s lives, and they don’t want to send Jesus away; they want to remain faithful. I have stood at so many gravesides and have seen the bereaved here in worship the following Sunday. They don’t want to send Jesus away; they want to worship.

Why? Jesus still seems so silent. But they want to pray, they want to worship, because they are choosing to honor and trust Jesus Christ as the King in whose presence *THEY* stand, even if they don’t fully understand His royal ways. They are making the faith choice to still worship. They are choosing to let God be God. How do you find the faith, the heroic faith, that keeps worshipping in such moments when Jesus seems silent? When your requests for a miracle, or a job, or restored health for you or a loved one just don’t see to be answered? Everybody I know who has survived a crisis with their faith intact got through it because they were prepared. And they were prepared because they believed, and they put that belief into practice through church attendance, prayer, Bible study and living lives of faithful discipleship. They believed they were living in the presence of the King, the real King Who loves them, the king they wish to serve come what may.

Of all the characters in the passion narratives, it is probably hardest for us to relate to Herod, because we think we are not at all like him. But then again, I don’t know ... wouldn’t we would like to see Jesus perform some sign? Wouldn’t it be great if Jesus miraculously took away all our pain, or all our illness? Wouldn’t it be great if He would just fix our children, or fix our situation at work, or even just fix the car? Would we become better believers as a result? Well, again, I don’t know. The Pharisees saw the miracles and still did not believe. The crowds saw the miracles and still turned on Jesus in the end. The guards at Jesus’ tomb were right there for the most amazing miracle of all and they still did not believe.

We do not believe what we see; we see what we believe. Let me say that again. We do not believe what we see; we see what we believe. Belief comes first ... and then you see! But when belief is not present, all the evidence in the world won’t be enough to convince. Belief opens the eyes to see; unbelief just will not see what is plainly there. We do not believe because we see; we see ... and we live .... because we believe. Herod did not believe. Herod wasn’t looking to find a Savior for his soul. Herod had long ago lost himself in luxury and power and indulgence. He wasn’t looking for anyone to save his life, and certainly wasn’t looking for a King to direct his life. If anything, Herod was bored; he was just looking for a distraction. When Jesus refused to perform for him, Herod sent Him away, and Herod’s soldiers threw a robe on Jesus, they decorated him, and they mocked him ... which, by the way, is exactly what we often do to Jesus every time we insist that He perform for us. We decorate Jesus as our magician when we only want Him to make our problems disappear. We dress Him up as our pretend king, when we really have no intention of serving Him unless it suits our purposes. We decorate Him as a sacred image of ourselves when all we want for him to do is tell us that we are right, and “they” are wrong. You can decorate Jesus anyway you want to, Herod, you can even mock Him, but He will not be forced to perform for you. He is the King, not you. When you believe that, then you will see ... and then you will live.

The reason we come to church is to worship a God who does not always precisely respond to our direction. He is the God who directs us, we are not the gods who direct Him. We perform for Him, not vice versa. He is God, not us. He is the King, not us. Let us live accordingly.

<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8lzmbAn8\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8lzmbAn8_Y) for a slightly PG rated video of this song

<sup>2</sup> Our opening hymn, “Wondrous King All-Glorious.” See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjjiTLIYDv0> for a very G rated version ©