

Proper 10b: 7/15/18
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I may be about the last person
you expected to see here this morning.
I'm young Herodias from that gory story you just heard
(but I may be better known from other sources as "Salome".)
The fact that they can't even get my name straight
shows that I was just a pawn in their game.
I'm here today to tell my story in my words.

As you can tell by looking at me, I'm all grown up.
All that stuff about dancing at my stepfather's birthday party and
the beheading of John the Baptist was a long, long time ago.
How would you like to be known solely on the basis of
a single episode of your childhood?
Especially one which has been so twisted and misunderstood.

First off, let me set the record straight about my dancing.
It was just dancing, ok?
Look how Mark mentions it matter of factly in his gospel.
To see anything more suggestive says a lot
about how our culture views young women.
So please don't jump to any conclusions.

Having said that, here's a little background about my family –
we really took the fun *out* of dysfunction!
My mother and namesake was Herodias,
first married to my father, another of the Herod boys
By this time she was with Herod Antipas of Galilee.

I'm still not sure why such an ambitious woman would go to
all that trouble just to switch Herods.
Especially to this Herod, who was the runt of the litter.
I'm not talking about physical stature but gravitas.

This Herod was supposed to inherit

the whole expanse of territory from his father,
my grandfather, Herod the Great.
But something happened because
on his deathbed "great" Herod changed his mind and
gave his son, my stepfather -- not-so-great Herod --
only a *fourth* of what was coming to him.
Not exactly a vote of confidence.

Can you imagine spending years expecting to get
New York City through the beautiful beaches of Maine
and ending up with, say, a corner of West Virginia?
Because that's kinda what Galilee was --
something of a backwater,
not the prime real estate of the Roman Empire.
But that's what my stepfather, Herod the not-so-great,
ended up with after waiting all those years.

As a child I didn't understand this,
but Herod the not-so-great must've felt, well, *not so great*.
He must've felt a little diminished,
wondering if there was *something more*.

Even his official title was a slap in the face --
"tetrarch" meaning a fourth . . . *not whole*.
Looking back, I wonder if I should have felt sorry for him.

I think John the Baptist got this.
Of course he was an adult, a young man who died too soon.
John must've known that Herod could use some
of that good news he was proclaiming.
That Herod might even be intrigued by the notion of repenting,
of having the chance to turn his life around and start over.

Even your gospel writer Mark, who had every reason *not*
to portray Herod in a sympathetic light, notices this.
Mark says Herod knew that John was a "righteous and holy man."
Herod *liked* listening to John, almost in spite of himself.

Herod did try to protect him, you know. Even Mark says so.
Herod didn't want to kill John the Baptist just to save face
on his birthday or any day.
Any more than I wanted John's head on a platter for my silly little dance.

Even my mother Herodias . . . I don't mean to make excuses but,
well, think of her situation.
Clearly she was a woman who liked being around power,
but as a woman
she was unable to wield much of it herself.
So she did what she could.
She protected her family's reputation from John's judgment.
She protected her husband's rule from becoming too tenuous,
too susceptible to wild-eyed rabble-rousers like John.

I think about my stepfather Herod, dead all these years.
I wonder, had he followed his instincts to protect John the Baptist
could he have been *great* after all?
Would doing the right thing have finally made Herod *whole*?

I've spent a lifetime second-guessing my own role in this.
What if I'd stood up to my mother?
Told her she wasn't thinking straight?
What if I'd not passed along that bizarre request to Herod?
What if I'd taken him up on his offer of giving me half of
his fourth of the kingdom?
Surely even a measly eighth of a kingdom is worth saving a man's life.

As I've gotten older, I've decided to stop asking
these questions that have no answers.
It's not going to bring back John,
or his cousin Jesus who was killed not too long after him.

I've decided the best I can do is to listen
to what they were saying all those years ago.
And this is what I'm hearing:
That we can all stand up and speak up for what's right,
just like John and Jesus did.

They show us that what's right almost always involves sticking up for the powerless and shaking up the powerful.

John and his cousin Jesus said that change *is* possible, because repentance -- *turning our lives toward* God's healing love -- is fresh every morning. Once we accept that healing love, then we go out and give it away to others. That's what they both did -- in their lives and even their deaths.

You don't have to watch things happening in the world, feeling helpless and hopeless. You can *do something*. By the grace of God, you can do the right thing, the righteous thing.

Trust me, you don't want to look back years from now wondering if there was something you could've done. A prayer for guts and guidance you could've prayed. An action to help the vulnerable you could've taken. An amends you could've made. A prophetic word for justice you could've spoken.

Take it from me, don't let anyone else hijack your story. Tell it yourself and tell it boldly. Tell it for yourself, and on behalf of others and this whole world God so loves. Tell it for justice and compassion. Tell it with love.

By the grace of God in Christ Jesus, whose cousin John the Baptist even Herod knew to be righteous and holy, what's happening in the world today that's on your heart? And what are you going to do about it, now, while you can?

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