Thursday 29th October

Ephesians 6:10-20, Luke 13: 31-end

Hymns: 12 Alleluia sing to J, 184 Breathe on Me, 205 Glorious things of thee

The thing that strikes me about Jesus in today's gospel is his clarity. Jesus is absolutely clear about who he is and the task before him. He is absolutely clear in the choices he is making. And he is absolutely clear that Herod will not stand in his way.

I wonder if we live with that kind of clarity in our own lives? Do we bring that kind of clarity to our relationships, conflicts, and decisions? What if we engaged the world with that kind of clarity?

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem when Pharisees stop him on the road and say, "*Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you*." He says 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.'"*

Do you hear the clarity with which he speaks? He doesn't defend or explain himself. He doesn't change his mind or turn around. And he doesn't avoid the work or the consequences of the work that are before him. He has committed himself to *"casting out demons and performing cures*." He has "*set his face to go to Jerusalem*" . That is less about his destination and more about his clarity.

I'm not talking about the kind of clarity that gives rise to an unwillingness to listen to others, or the self-assurance that we are always right. I'm talking about the kind of clarity that gives rise to integrity, wholeheartedness, and a vision of life that is connected to something larger than and beyond ourselves. I'm talking about the kind of clarity that fosters honesty and authenticity, strengthens commitment and resolve, and enables us to see beyond our own self-interest.

That's the kind of clarity I want in my life. What do you imagine our lives and world would be like if we lived with that kind of clarity? I think it would change our relationships, how we treat each other and ourselves, the way we pray, our priorities, what we do, the decisions we make, and what really matters to us. I think it would deepen our lives, and open our eyes, ears, and hearts to each other in new ways. It may not eliminate our fears but I think it would show us "that some things are more important to us than what we fear".

So what keeps us from that clarity? I don't think it's a matter of needing more information or intelligence. I think it's a matter of facing the Herod in our lives. Herod is the cataracts on our clarity. I'm talking about Herod as a metaphor for all the things that cloud our clarity.

Herod is:

- The illusion that someone else is in charge of and responsible for our life;
- The institutions to which we give unquestioning loyalty even after they have betrayed us;
- The archaic fears, primal wounds, or chronic guilt that determines and drives our lives;
- The part in us that just wants to make others happy, gain approval, and meet expectations;
- The stuck places in our life where we do the same old things over and over but nothing ever changes; and
- All the ways in which we avoid ourselves, turn away from our life, and refuse to take responsibility for ourselves.

Herod distorts my seeing and causes me to lose my clarity. When I lose clarity in my life, I lose myself. The world is big and I am not. The world is powerful and I am not. I feel overwhelmed and powerless. I get stuck and act as if I have no choices.

The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and Israel's ethnic cleansing in Palestine are examples of what I am talking about. How many of us want to help but don't know what to do? How many of us have felt powerless to make a difference? How many of us have felt guilty when we complain about our life or problems and then look at what the people of Ukraine & Gaza are going through?

I've struggled with those things and I suspect you have too. But what if that struggle is about our own lack of clarity?

Clarity isn't about knowing and seeing everything. And it doesn't mean we have all the answers. It's about knowing and seeing ourselves. It's knowing our own heart, our deepest loyalties, and what matters most to us. It's about seeing clearly our gifts and abilities, and at the same time acknowledging our limitations.

When we can gain some of that kind of clarity we find a bit more of ourselves, direction for our life, and choices before us. And most of the time we know what to do. We sit in silence holding the fear and pain of Ukraine & what little is left of Palestine. We support organizations and ministries that are reaching out to those areas. We have compassion for ordinary Russian citizens who are bearing the brunt of the world's sanctions. We pray for soft hearts and peace. We invite others into clarity. And we live with hope that darkness cannot overcome the light.

Every Herod in my life is a thief and takes from me my freedom, power, and ability to choose. Every Herod in my life wants to own my life and demands my heart, my deepest loyalties, and my integrity. Every Herod in my life wants me to betray and do violence to myself, and that always ripples out to affect others.

That’s not how I want to live. And that’s not how I want you or this parish to live. I want us to live with the kind of clarity that inspires us to, “*go and tell that fox,” “Listen,…”*

What are your words of clarity that you want that fox to hear? What are the words of clarity you need to hear?

Who or what in your life today needs your clarity? And who or what are the Herods you need to confront? What is clouding your clarity? What cataracts do you need to remove?

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