

Title: “Enemies of Jesus”

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Matthew 2:13

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Service Readings: 2 Samuel 7:4-16, Romans 4:13-18, Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Throughout the life of Jesus, he was opposed by both spiritual and physical enemies. He overcame all of them so that we might be set free through his victory.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

As Jesus hung on the cross, do you think he reflected on his earthly life and inventoried all who had opposed him? Some of them were actually responsible for his crucifixion but they were only the latest to consider him an enemy; there were many, many who came before. Indeed, from the very moment of his birth he was hunted down for slaughter. Matthew describes this in our gospel passage today. Starting at verse 13 he records:

¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Herod learned of a child who was born; a child who scripture called a mighty king. He viewed this news as a direct attack on his throne and was driven to mitigate that threat, even eliminate it if possible. It mattered not that his sword of judgement was pointed at the heart of a perfectly innocent infant child. All that mattered was that his judgement would be executed in a way that would preserve his throne. And so he killed every young male child in the area.

Years later, when Jesus hung on the cross, do you think Herod entered his mind? For Christ was suffering God’s judgement for him, too. The sin he became included the sin that tried to murder him as a small child. He who knew know sin became sin for all the world, even for Herod. It covered the Jewish leaders who handed him over to Pilot. And it covered Judas. It covered everyone. And Jesus knew it. And Jesus accepted it.

So often, when I read this portion of Scripture from Matthew I tend to understand the mind of Herod. I ask myself what could drive someone to hunt down and destroy others for no reason other than power? But this morning I want to ask a different question: What could drive God to hunt down the sins of others for no other reason than to offer these transgressors forgiveness and salvation? You see, I think *that* is the question that lays hidden in this passage.

Herod was an enemy of Jesus; that much is obvious for he chose self over God. He chose his throne over God’s throne. Even when the message of salvation was described to him by the Magi, instead

of embracing it, instead of seeking it out to better understand it, he rejected it and then actively fought to destroy it.

And even in spite of all this, Jesus would die for him, too. He would petition the father to forgive those who were actively nailing him to the cross, but that petition would also extend outward in both space and time. Back it would go to Adam and to Eve... even to Herod. And forward it would go to you and to me.

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” What a powerful request hidden underneath such a simple statement. To be forgiven, one must repent and request it. And to be compelled to repent, one must feel the weight of his sin. And to feel the weight of his sin, one must have faith. And to have faith, one must have the Holy Spirit. And to have the Holy Spirit, one must be sought out by God. You see? When Jesus asked that mercy be extended, what underpinned that request was nothing less than this: that the father would send the Holy Spirit out into the world to find and try to convict every sinful soul in the hope that they would repent and turn back to God. This is what Jesus was asking! No sin would fall outside this invitation of forgiveness. Not Herod’s. Not the soldiers. No one. There was no sin that Jesus excluded from his petition.

Herod sent his warriors to kill Jesus. Jesus responded by asking that the Holy Spirit be sent to him with an offer of forgiveness.

The Jewish leaders handed Jesus over to be crucified. Jesus responded by asking that the Holy Spirit be sent to them with an offer of forgiveness.

Pilot, who wanted to wash his own sins away, sent Jesus to the cross. Jesus responded by asking the Holy Spirit to be sent to him with an offer of forgiveness.

You see? The question is not about Herod, or the Jewish leaders, or Pilot, or the soldiers. The *real* question has always been about God: What could drive God to hunt down the sins of others for no other reason than to offer these transgressors forgiveness and salvation?

Let’s get a bit more personal: What could drive God to seek *you*, to send *you* the Holy Spirit, so that you can be convicted and turn back to him? In spite of the life you may have lived, or may be living. In spite of the terrible choices you may have made. In spite of uncountable times you have pushed him out of your life or have hidden from him. What could drive Jesus to not only take on your sins, to suffer for them, but then to ask God to actively seek you out?

The answer is simple. It’s love. He unconditionally loves you. And this love is active – it doesn’t wait for you to find it. He sends it out to you and even gives you the ability to reach out and receive it! And you did, in your baptism. But he also knows that you will not be perfected until you are raised on the last day and so he continues to actively seek you out through his word and through the body and blood of Jesus. He calls to you, beckons you near so that he can then lay upon you his mercy, so that he can offer you the peace of his forgiveness.

What could drive God to seek you, to send you the Holy Spirit, so that you can be convicted and turn back to him? We already answered that. He loves you. Do you love him? He has sought you out. Turn back to him and receive that love.

Please pray with me.

What would cause you, the creator of all, to seek us out, us lowly, sinful beings? Are we that significant to you that you would actively search for us, call us by name, and offer us forgiveness? You know what we have done and yet you still love us and want us back. Here we are, Lord. You have found us. You have forgiven us. And for this we will forever praise you.
Amen.