

Do you like stories with happy endings? Well, then you surely enjoyed our Scripture reading for tonight. Pilate and Herod, two rulers who had been against each other, become friends. How sweet. In the midst of all the violence and bloodshed, the whips, the thorns, and the nails, we look over at Pilate and Herod, and they are not angry at each other anymore.

And it's all because of Jesus. If it had not been for Him, Pilate and Herod would have remained bitter toward each other. Yet I doubt if these two rulers thought to send Jesus a thank you card. "Thank you, Jesus, that we are now friends with each other." They couldn't care less about Him.

To Pilate, Jesus is a nuisance. He just wants to wash his hands of Him. How delighted he is, therefore, to learn that Jesus is from Galilee. That's Herod's jurisdiction. "I'll send Jesus to Herod, who happens to be in Jerusalem, and he can deal with Him."

To Herod, Jesus is nothing more than a court jester. He wants a sign from Him; a powerful, divine sign. He has heard about His miracles. Now is his opportunity to see for himself. Herod wants Jesus to perform. But Jesus stands there, mouth closed, hands at His side. He gives nothing to Herod.

And yet, had Herod known the Scriptures, he would have recognized this as a sign. "*Like a lamb led to the slaughter; like a sheep which before its shearers is silent, so He opens not His mouth.*" Isaiah had written about Jesus, that before His accusers, He would do nothing. He would stand there and take it.

Here is your sign, Herod. Even more than His miracles, Jesus' silence before His accusers, His being led to the slaughter like a willing lamb, is the evidence that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, because Isaiah, and all of Scripture declares, that the all-powerful God would lay aside His power and become weak on behalf of sinners.

There is a little of Herod in all of us. Like Tim Taylor the "tool man," we like things with power, and more power. Sports teams, engines, you name it. And also with God. We love to tell the pagans, "My God can beat up your gods." And because a little bit of Herod lives in us, we are confused and frustrated when the pagan gods appear to be in control. Why aren't more sinners turning to God? Why are those who stir up war and bloodshed, who delight in injustice, having their way? And, come to think of it, why isn't our own congregation growing by leaps and bounds? Like Herod, we tell Jesus to perform. Do something powerful. Do something for us. Do a sign to prove to us that You are in control.

But we are looking past the signs that He gives us. The power we want to see with God we do see in the weakness of this Suffering Servant. Jesus did not stand before Pilate and Herod to show them what God can do, but what God is willing to suffer.

You and I are like Pilate and Herod in another way. On Good Friday they became friends with each other. And at Jesus' expense. You and I were God's enemies. But also on Good Friday, and at Jesus' expense, we are now His friends. Jesus was willing to suffer the bitter agony that you

and I deserve for our sins. And on account of His sufferings and death, God forgives you. All of you He forgives. He is not your enemy, but your friend.

Do you want a sign to prove this? Look to your baptism into Christ where your sins are declared to be forgiven. Look to Jesus' body and blood in His Supper which He gives to you. Here is God's peace with you always.

Herod would laugh at these signs. And today, all the Herods out there do just that. But these are the signs that God gives to you. The forgiveness of your sins in Jesus Christ through Holy Words, Holy Water, and Holy Food.

Now this truly is the story, and the only story, that has a happy ending, and it's all because of Jesus. Amen.