

Some Pharisees said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." Had Jesus been influenced by self-preservation he would undoubtedly have taken their advice. But Jesus had other things on his mind.

He instructed the Pharisees to tell Herod (whom he refers to as "that fox") that he was casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow. In other words Jesus was not one for turning from his task even when the stakes were high.

And for Jesus the stakes were very high indeed. Although Herod had lost his authority to rule in his own right Herod remained a significant figure. The Roman occupiers relied on Herod's compliance and his standing to maintain the peace.

To alienate Herod was to court instability and possible rebellion. The threat of such an outcome gave Herod a degree of influence with the governor. Influence he was undoubtedly prepared

to use to have his murderous intent toward Jesus enacted.

Jesus would have known that the threat was real. He had for some time been exciting interest from crowds of people and was being asked if he was the Messiah.

The suggestion that Jesus might be the Messiah, the chosen one would have provided Herod with sufficient ammunition to sow the seeds of doubt into the mind of a nervous ruler. Pilate the Roman ruler knew that he was being watched by Rome and that his job and his neck depended on his ability to maintain the peace.

The last thing he needed was for there to be an insurrection that threatened his authority and that of Roman. Or some religious dispute that threatened to boil over into physical violence.

Herod had the capacity to capitalize on whatever fears Pilate had in relation to Jesus and the

resentment of the people toward their Roman occupiers. This made him a powerful figure. The Pharisees' warning to Jesus expressed a real and present danger Jesus chose to resist.

Those of you who have experienced a life threatening illness or a serious accident know the threat of death; as will those of you whose lives have been threatened. Those who have experienced such things know how the prospect of death focuses one's mind.

How what is important can become very clear; and how tempting it can be to allow oneself to plunge into despair and despondency and give up hope. Jesus was clear that he had work to do. If he experienced doubt and fear there is no evidence of it in the gospel account.

He seemed to accept that he would be killed, that it would happen in Jerusalem, but that there was a real urgency for him to exercise his ministry.

He also expressed a heartfelt compassion for the people of Jerusalem. Jerusalem represented not just the city as a municipality and the seat of civic authority but as the centre of the Jewish faith Jesus wanted aligned with kingdom values.

An adverse diagnosis, unexpected changes in our physical capacity or life expectancy, can focus our minds to things that are important. They can empower us to attend to important matters; the distribution of property and finance, succession issues. Tending to relationships that have been fractured or neglected, saying goodbyes.

As a church and a parish community we are often faced with prophets of gloom that predict the end of life as we know it. People have for years written off traditional churches such as St Paul's.

Our presence here this morning puts the lie to that prediction. That is not to say that all can remain as it was. Even a cursory glance at our fellow worshippers confirms an aging profile.

It also confirms that we are not all in the same age bracket and undoubtedly have different tastes, needs, expectations and capacities. As the makeup of who we are changes so will the way we express our faith and engage with the broader community.

The task before us is to recognize the signs and to (as Jesus did) focus on the task in hand. Sure there are threats. But succumbing to despair and despondency, giving up hope; will only compound whatever difficulties we might need to face and will almost certainly exacerbate any decline.

Circling the wagons, holding on slavishly to the way things have been. Withdrawing into ourselves are all understandable responses when the future seems uncertain.

But what this morning's gospel reminds us of is that when the Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He did not sit down and wait to die. He did

not start reminiscing about past achievements or bemoaning the failures of others. He got on with the task in hand.

"Go tell that fox I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow" said Jesus. There are many demons the people of Ipswich need St Paul's to help them cast out and many cures to perform.

There are the demons of drug addiction, gambling, pornography, domestic violence, racism, consumerism, materialism, extremism and the like. Another demon in our society is social isolation. This is visited on people through their life circumstances; they have a disability, they have lost a life partner, they are unemployed, they are disconnected from their circle of friends through relocation.

The siting of St Paul's in the heart of the city, together with your aspiration that this building realizes its potential as the city church, provides a

significant opportunity for St Paul's to become a place of healing and hope. A place where people can explore issues and make connections, where they can participate in worship and other activities, listen to fine music.

Jesus had real compassion for Jerusalem.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem How often I desired to gather your children as a hen gathers her brood” said Jesus. Capturing Jesus compassion for the people of Jerusalem and translating it to the city of Ipswich will invigorate the mission of St Paul's.

Much is already being done through worship, study groups and fellowship, MU, the Variety Market, the support centre, Music Box, Chaplaincy ministry, the Anglican Men's Society, Religious Instruction in schools, bell ringers, lunch time concerts, to name a few activities.

I noted before that we are not all in the same age bracket and undoubtedly have different tastes,

needs, expectations and capacities and that as the makeup of who we are changes so will the way we express our faith and engage with the broader community.

Some of the activities we are presently engaged in may need to give way to others as our interests and capacity changes. What needs to remain front and centre is St Paul's compassion for the city of Ipswich and a desire to engage in the mission of casting out demons and bringing wholeness.

How we do that in 2016 and into the future; may well be different from how St Paul's has done it in the past. Indeed I have no doubt that St Paul's for all of its existence has engaged in mission in ways that differ greatly from how things were done by Jesus.

The Pharisees came to Jesus with news that Herod wanted to kill him. It was no idle threat because Jesus would have been aware that Herod had the capacity to influence how the Roman rulers acted.

In spite of the risks he faced, Jesus was determined to carry on with his mission, to cast out demons and cure the sick. The threat of death seemed to sharpen his resolve; as the threat to our mortality often stiffens our resolve to attend to matters we might otherwise ignore.

As a church and a parish we can allow a negative narrative to paralyse our life, or like Jesus we can focus on the task in hand; enliven our compassion for this city, reshape our mission to reflect our present interests and capacities and relevance to those we seek to serve and walk in Jesus footsteps.

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