

SERMON: "PREPARE YE..." For God's Plan."

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, December 5, 2021, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

[Our reading today is all about "plans" – Herod's, Zechariah and Elizabeth's/yours/mine/our earthly plans and God's. Last week we heard the angel Gabriel tell a puzzled/perplexed Mary that "nothing is impossible for God;" and this week we hear that this also extends to how God's plans. So, as we begin; let me ask you another question: What's your plan? And, how's your plan doing/going?]

Our reading opened with a sentence that is more than a vague chronological/historical 'marker;' it provides for us clear, yet contrasting, examples of the fragility of our all-too-human plots/schemes/plans – dreams. Luke 1:5 introduces us to two individuals/people/men; *"In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah:"* Herod – Yes, that Herod! – and Zechariah the Temple priest, who's married to Elizabeth – who, together, we're told lived with the shame/stigma of being childless.

[“Ego”/Latin: “I”/meaning: “a ‘person’s’ sense of self-esteem/self-importance; Self-awareness/self-centered: part of mind responsible for “sense of personal identity.” Ego defines self against others/world. “Egotist:” a person who is excessively conceited or self-absorbed; self-seeker. “ego-centric:” thinking only of oneself, without regard for the feelings or desires of others. Human sin: wanted to become God/God’s “I”: (3x God says “I” in reference to what God has done for Adam) into ‘ego’/“I” (1st x Adam uses it to separate himself from God/define self-against God.)]

While historians are divided as to Herod's actual legacy *[He united Judea under Roman rule/undertook major building projects/renovation of the second Temple/Temple Mount(Temple of Jesus' life)/port city of Caesarea Maritima/fortress of Masada]* and his despotic/dictatorial/violent – not to mention paranoid/homicidal! – rule by force/fear; most agree that Herod was a man who sought to shape history/events to his will/ego/plan. To say that Herod was a monster is an understatement. Born into a politically/well-connected family, Herod lived a life focused on political power – at all/any cost. Married ten times, he executed two wives/three sons fearing their power/doubting their loyalty. He lived by revenge/plotting and killing his father's killers – among many of his rivals/adversaries. Herod governed by fear/force - forcing others to bend to his will(notably the religious authorities who would align with him to kill Jesus) – and died diseased/despised/feared/alone, only to have his 'kingdom' divided/dismantled/destroyed. Herod's ego-driven plans of power/prestige/status/significance died with him/because of him. Here, Herod stands for the fallen nature of our human plans/earth bound/doomed to fail/die out with us.

[“Best laid plans of mice/men...” (Idiom/saying attributed to Robbie Burns poem, “To a Mouse.”: “But, Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,/In proving foresight may be vain;/The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men/Gang aft agley,/An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,/For promis'd joy!”) No matter how carefully planned/something will go awry/wrong/not as planned. Expression: ‘don't count chickens/eggs hatch/things/turn out as planned/no matter how much planning/hoping/“promised joy” – leaving nothing but grief/pain.]

“But, I'm not like Herod;” you say – ok but, we're capable of it/human nature to be driven by self-needs/wants/hopes/plans. If we're honest, we'd rather rule/dominate/lead than serve/submit/follow, get ahead/win – have our plan work – but, at what cost? This is where

Zechariah/Elizabeth come in/where God's plan bests/outdoes/defeats theirs/ours/yours/mine: it's where God teaches us to wait/put our faith/trust in Him/His plan – not in ours. For Zechariah/Elizabeth, life wasn't/hadn't what/turned out as they'd hoped/planned: Sure, Zechariah was a Temple Priest – but that was a family job! But what they wanted were children, but Elizabeth was “barren”/both “were getting on in years!” In those days, if you had children you had everything – joy/happiness/security/future: without children, you had nothing. For them, it seemed impossible/too late; as a result, they waited/“endured” their lives in “disgrace”/shame/dishonor/humiliation – in dis-ease/without peace.

[“Wait”:went from O/F/ “be watchful”/“lie in wait”/anticipating/awaiting to “staying put”/“delay”/“left behind”/postponing – sounds like our dreams/plans... But, that's when life happens/in the planning to plan stage/anticipating/awaiting:It's in the waiting that/when God shows up! All 3 children/conceived in the planning to plan stage: no such thing as the ‘right time’ – it's God's time!]

And that's what God does! God makes life out of barren places – where we wait/feel lost/empty/alone, God fills the void with His presence/promise/plan. This was God's plan with creation/Sarah(Gn11:30)/Rebekah(Gen25:21)/Rachel(Gen29:31)/Hannah(1 Sam1:5) – then Elizabeth/Mary: it was His plan with the cradle/Cross/empty tomb! It is God's purpose to create/provide/replace barrenness/brokenness/hopelessness with purpose/grace/hope – a hope that does not disappoint/forgives/redeems/restores! As we anticipate/await the birth of the promised Son of God, prepare for His coming by letting God's plan/promise become yours. Zechariah(Priest!) – even though it was what he wanted, doubted God's plan and was humbled/taught to have patience/trust:have faith/trust and “wait for the Lord/keep to his way, and he will exalt you”(Ps37:31)/give you peace. Amen