

Meet Herod. Herod never meant for things to happen the way they did. It really was supposed to be just another dinner party. Okay, maybe not *just* a dinner party—the guest list was pretty selective this time. Only the movers and shakers and those whose families had been a part of the community for generations had a written invitation. And it’s true that Herod had ordered his servants to shine all the silver platters and polish all of the brass goblets, which he didn’t do every time he had people over. But this party was supposed to be different. After the John the Baptizer challenged the legitimacy of his marriage and his credibility, this banquet was going to be Herod’s chance to quell any doubts about his right and ability to lead. After this meal, no one would question whether he knew what his doing. No, they were going to be in awe of his power.

That someone ended up murdered, and John no less, has left Herod bewildered for weeks. Sometimes he wonders if he could have done things differently. Maybe he shouldn’t have been so quick to toss about his power like he did. Maybe he should have told his step-daughter and wife to ask for something else. But every time he starts wondering that, he knows deep down that if he had to do it over again, he’s not sure he would do it differently. If he went back on his word, all of this guests would have thought he was a weak leader with no mind of his own. And after all these years of waiting to take the reigns of leadership, there was no way he was going to sully his reputation now. Besides, it was *just* John. He was weird anyway—eating insects for dinner.

*Don’t you understand?* He’s stuck between a rock and a hard place. Certainly he’s not the first person to know themselves only according to how their friends and colleagues view them? Can you blame a person for wanting to make a good impression? Plenty of other people have gotten caught up in establishing themselves as steady, reliable, and knowledgeable in front of their peers. Besides, it’s not like he had any other choice. It’s all he knew. It’s all anyone knew. Besides, isn’t it really his wife’s fault that John ended up murdered? Herod may have been in charge, but his wife Herodias wasn’t exactly powerless either.

So, let’s meet Heroidas.

Herodias knows that her husband blames her for what happened to John the Baptizer, but she wants people to know that if you stood in her shoes you might not have been above doing what she did. Okay, maybe you wouldn’t have demanded someone’s death, but

think about how embarrassing and maddening it would have felt to have been called out in front of the entire community by someone like John. He had no business in judging her. Look at him with his matted hair. At least she was educated, respectable, and refined. Besides, it's not like she was the first person desperate for revenge or a little control on things. Sure, a beheading is extreme, but she's not the only person whose felt the lure of instant gratification or the satisfaction of getting the last word. In any case, it was her husband who made the final call. He was the one with the true power, wasn't he?

Don't dare say that to her daughter Herodias(or, Salome as Matthew calls her). To her, any power is better than none. She'd love to have a little power. Power to say no. Power to say stop. Power to say that she was more than curves of her body. Power to think and act apart from what her parents' wanted. But she knew nothing else. And she was so afraid of going against what people expected of her. She was so afraid of ruffling fathers and causing any ire. She didn't even know that she could have a different opinion or experience or belief than that of even her closest family members. When her step-father told her she could have anything she wanted it didn't even occur to her to think about what *she* would want, only what her mother would want or need. Now, months later, she can't help but wonder what would have happened if she had told her mother "no." She's never believed herself to have any influence or power aside from her looks, her desirability, and her willingness not to question the status quo. She can't be the only one to think this way, can she? If only she knew that the power she yearns for is the same power she gave away.

That's what one of the guests sitting at the first table wanted to tell her when he saw her dancing. Unlike some of the others in attendance he was not mesmerized by her dance moves. Instead, he saw her sorrow and her exhaustion. Then when John's head arrived on the platter decked out with bunches of grapes, figs, olives, he knew he had needed to speak up against this farce. Who cared that girls like Herodias Salome were expected to perform for people like him. This was all just too ridiculous. He wanted to speak up, but he was scared. He had a family to support. He couldn't do anything to put his reputation or standing in jeopardy. There would be another time to speak up and put the power of his voice and righteous indignation to work. Just not now.

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There's no doubt that Herod's dinner party was a night with an enviable list of society's who's-who. But, the questions that first haunted people that evening are no different than the ones that you and I face each day: **What will you do with the power that you have?** We don't need the exert dominion over nations to be powerful. Power isn't restricted to geopolitical domination. It's the ability to use what you have and who you are as you choose to build up or tear down, to nurture life or feed death.

How you use your power is largely based what feeds your sense of authority. For Herod, it was others' respect. For his step-daughter it was the fear of being rejected. For her mother, it was the sense that peace only comes from controlling other people and the future. And you can't blame them, for it was all they knew. It was all they had.

*But it's not all we have.* We have the cross and empty tomb of Jesus Christ. At the heart of their power is the love of God made known in Jesus' death and resurrection. And he tells us...Love tells us...God tells us that through Jesus, there is another way. There is another story. This love is more than a theory or a notion, it is power. Power to bear the weight and fear of your failures, your mistakes, your sin, your anger, and the worst you have to offer to God. Power to be a force to be reckoned with. This power doesn't depend on your success, your esteem, how much you have to retire with, or what others think of you. It's based on a God who created us in God's very image out of endless love. It picks you up when you fall, dusts you off, and sends you forward to love and serve and give all that you are have because there will always be more from where it came from.

You are  
more powerful,  
more holy,  
more capable, and  
more qualified  
than you can imagine or create on your own.

If you think you have no power, you will squander your gifts and sell yourself short in the name of false humility. If you see your gifts and opportunities as entitlements or things you deserve because you've "earned" them, you run the likelihood of being selective, stingy, and controlled by what you have or do not have. So, celebrate the gift of God's redeeming power. Give thanks. Then live. Fully...boldly... and without fear, for God has made you holy.

In a few moments we will take our places at another dinner table Like the other one, there will be lots of people and only the finest bread and wine will do. But unlike the other one, there will be seats for all. Instead of a head on a platter, there is only love made known on a cross.

It's the only power you'll ever need.

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