

## Hana Pono

Mark 6:14-29

If anyone ever tells you that they don't read the Bible because it is boring, read them these verses. Whoa. Mistaken identity. Wild parties, sexy dancing, bizarre requests, strange promises, heads served on a platter for dessert, and sadly, a ruler who was more interested in his opinion poll ratings than in doing the right thing. Our story tells us that Herod knew what the right thing was—his na'au—his gut and intuition told him to listen to John the Baptist. But in the end, he chose the wrong thing to protect his fragile reputation. King Herod chose **against** Hana Pono. What can **we** learn from this story? Let us pray together.

E pule kākou: "Dear God who gives us free will, teach us the way of Jesus to help us choose Hana Pono. Amen."

In the New Testament there is another story about a rich powerful politician during Jesus' time who choose against Hana Pono. This other story is about a man who knew Jesus was innocent, but condemned him to death anyway. Do you remember? Right, Pontius Pilot told the crowd he knew Jesus was innocent, but pressure from the crowd convinced him to condemn Jesus to death.

Similarly, in our passage today, Herod knew John was a good man, verse 20 tells us that Herod was perplexed when he listened to John, yet he **liked** to listen to him. God was working through John the Baptist to heal Herod, but other forces were working on Herod also. The biggest influence on Herod was his wife, named Herodias in our passage (but we know her real name was Miriamne). Herod killed his previous wife Doris so he could marry Herodias—oh, incidentally, he also killed his brother Phillip who was married to her. What a lovely 'ohana, right?

Well, John the Baptist called Herod out for murdering his brother and marrying his wife. John being so blunt infuriated Herod's new wife, Herodias, and she vowed to get her revenge.

So now Herod is having a huge party, and Herod's daughter comes in to dance for the crowd. The Greek verb here means to dance with the purpose of excitement. Herod's daughter dances to excite the crowd. Even though our author here names the daughter Herodias, all other history records say that Herod's daughter's name was Salome. The parallel stories in Matthew 14 and Luke 3 also mis-name Herod's wife, but do not name the daughter.

Let's stop here a moment and talk about the "facts" of the Gospels. The main point of these stories about Herod is that while his na'au knew John the Baptist was right about preaching and repentance, Herod, instead, listened to other voices. The details of these various stories are significantly different in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but this theme is the same. So which story has the "right" details and facts?

Asking which story is "right" is a modern question. The original hearers would not have had the problem of hearing several stories with different details. For an example, if we look at the story of the creation of the world in Genesis 1, we realize that there is a completely different story of creation in Genesis chapter 2. One story talks about Adam and Eve being made together at the **beginning** of creation. The other story talks about Adam being created at the **end** of creation, with Eve being made later from his rib. The first story talks about seven days, the second story does not even mention time at all. These stories can't both be factually

true, but they are both included in the Bible. Which one is “right?” They both are creation stories—both are true. Another example is just four chapters later in Genesis--the story of the flood—which actually has two stories intertwined. One story says the Noah took a pair of every animal on the arc, but just three verses later it says Noah took seven pairs of each animal on the ark. Which story is true? We don’t know the “facts,” but both stories are true as far as trying to help us understand our origins as God’s people. We have the same complexity in the creation stories of the Hawaiian people. Folks from Hawai’i Island have one set of stories, Maui stories are different; O’ahu stories are different again. Which story is the “true” Hawaiian story? Can you see this is the wrong question because anybody that has any na’au knows the Maui story is correct, right??

The writers of the Gospels were telling stories to help us understand the human issues they were grappling with. Here, Herod struggled against his own na’au – his gut instinct told him that John the Baptist had something important to say. Instead, Herod listened to his very angry wife, furious that John dared to criticize her marriage to Herod. Just as in Hawaiian stories, when different kūpuna tell the same story in different ways, so also our Bible stories often tell the same story in different ways. But we know this. Herod chose **against** hana pono, he chose against doing the right and righteous thing, and, instead, he chose the easy and popular thing to keep peace in the family—even though a good innocent man lost his life.

Jesus knew that sometimes doing the right thing would not be popular, even within a family. Jesus’s own brothers and sisters thought he was crazy. Both Herod and Pontus Pilot knew Jesus was innocent, but chose the easy and wrong thing to keep the crowds quiet.

Being a Christian, both in ancient Israel and in this time and place means that we often have unpopular ideas and opinions. Jesus said **love** one another, and yet our society and culture are filled with people yelling at each other and fighting—sometimes even in the name of God. Jesus said love God, not fame and fortune and money. And yet our culture worships money. Religious people fight over the interpretations of this rule or that law or this verse or that verse, but Jesus was very clear—we are to love one another rather than worship any particular rule or verse or law. Jesus always taught that people and aloha are more important than the rules. Let me say that again. **Jesus always taught that people and aloha are more important than the rules.** Our relationship with ke Akua is more important than rules about this behavior or following this rule about who we can marry. All of these rules made by religions are false arguments against our na’au. We must always follow our na’au about loving God and loving one another.

So our story today is not about sexy dancing or cutting off the head of someone to keep peace in the family. This story is about each one of **us** deciding to follow Jesus when decisions made in aloha seem to be unpopular. But if we follow love, our na’au will know that aloha is the right path, and we will follow aloha to a pono path with God and one another. Herod and Pontius Pilot decided against aloha, and their lives became miserable. How do I know? Because they neglected this simple commandment of Jesus, “Aloha the Lord your God with all of your heart and na’au and mind, and aloha your neighbor as yourself.”

Follow Jesus, love one another, trust your na'au, and **your** life will be hana pono. Amene.