

Sermon Notes – March 16, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 13: 31-35
Peace Lutheran Church
“Save and Protect”

Among the themes running through the gospel readings for Lent this year are *possible explanations for suffering*. Of course, none of these explanations are fully satisfying; nor do they cover all sorts of suffering. But in today's reading Jesus explains why he puts Himself in danger and that He will indeed suffer humiliation and death – and explanation being that suffering might be required to do the ministry to which one is called.

There are some interesting points about the passage of today. For example, there is no evidence that Herod was seeking to harm Jesus; in fact, Herod was curious to see Him (Luke 9: 7-9; 23: 8-12). The Pharisees seem to have invented this hostility in order to get Jesus to move on. The rooster imagery – as in, Peter would deny Him three times in the night, before the early morning hours - echoes several Old Testament references to God as a protective parent bird (Deut. 32: 11-12; Ps. 91: 4). And Luke 13: 35 is not only a prediction of the crowd's shouts at the triumphal entry, but a quotation from Psalm 118, a song of praise at the approach to Jerusalem by one who has survived danger and has been rescued by God. Thus, part of what Jesus is saying is that His hearers will only truly see Him when they have been rescued from their hardness of heart.

The first reading comes at a time of triumph for Abram: he has just rescued his nephew Lot from an invading army and has then been blessed by Melchizedek, the priest - kind of what would become Jerusalem. Now, decades after the promise at his call that he would have many descendants. God appears in a vision. Abram, however, is less awestruck than skeptical - what kind of shield is this God who has not fulfilled the divine promises? In response, God not only reaffirms those promises but also reveals in some detail how they will be fulfilled. And He seals that promise with a strange ritual: instead of Abram doing anything except preparation, God is the One who walks between the severed animal halves and alone seals the deal. Note that the last of the people to be displaced by Abram's descendants are the Jebusites, the original inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Earlier in his letter to the Philippians (as we will hear on Passion Sunday), Paul quoted the Christ hymns to urge his hearers to imitate Christ in humble service. Now he asks them to imitate him in looking to God and to the gospel for confidence. Citizenship would have been an important concept for Paul. Roman citizens were protected from torture and allowed to appeal their convictions to the emperor (a right Paul himself may have been exercising when he wrote his letter). But in God, Paul and the Philippians had a more fundamental and powerful allegiance and protector than the Roman Empire. The empire's protection lasted at most only until death, while God's protection goes beyond. And as he does in Corinthians 15, Paul talks about the transformation of our bodies in the resurrection into something different from our present state, yet recognizable.