

St. Columba's Episcopal Church  
March 16, 2025 – The Second Sunday of Lent  
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Psalm 27, Philippians 3:17-4:1, Luke 13:31-35  
Trusting God  
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This morning I will be speaking about our lessons from Genesis, Psalm 27, and Luke's Gospel and considering the issue of trusting God.

The portion of Genesis that we heard is about God establishing a covenant with Abram, thus initiating the special relationship between God and the Israelites described throughout the Hebrew Bible. Abram – whose name God will change to Abraham as a sign of the covenant – encounters God in a vision. God promises to be his protector and to give him as many descendants as there are stars in the sky. This was a curious promise, since Abram's wife, Sarai – whose name will also be changed, to Sarah – was barren and they were old. But Abram “believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.” A different translation (Tanakh) reads, “And because [Abram] put his trust in the Lord, [the Lord] reckoned it to his merit.” Abram's faith was a matter of trusting profoundly in a person, the personal God who had given his promises to Abram.

God went on to speak of giving Abram the “promised land.” This time Abram wanted some assurance of God's promise: “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” What follows is very strange to us. The ritual of cutting animals in half and passing between them is found in the Bible and other ancient near Eastern writings. The context of such a ritual is an agreement or covenant between two parties, and the essence of the ritual is a self-curse. The persons involved demonstrate, by walking between the pieces of the animals, that they will be like the dead animals if they violate the covenant. Usually the weaker party in a covenant is the one who thus invokes the self-curse. Amazingly, in this case, it is God – symbolized by “a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch” – who invokes the self-curse. This underscores the trustworthiness of the covenant on God's side.

Psalm 27 is a psalm of trust in God. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?” The psalmist trusts God in the face of human foes and adversaries, an army of enemies, and when malicious people tell lies about him. The psalmist declares that when the human beings who are meant to give support instead forsake him – “Though my father and my mother forsake me” – the Lord will sustain him, lead him on a level path, and give comfort to his heart. The psalmist's trust in God is clearly not based on a life free of difficulties. The psalmist's declaration of faith is that while human beings are often not trustworthy, yet God is trustworthy.

Now let's look at today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. This passage makes reference to the events leading to his crucifixion. The final verse – "you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'" – refers to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Some Pharisees had come to warn Jesus that Herod, the ruler of this region under the Roman Empire, was out to kill him. Jesus tells them to go back to Herod – "that fox" – and tell him that Jesus will not be scared off, but will continue his mission of healing the sick and casting out demons until his work is finished. With bitter irony Jesus speaks of Jerusalem as the city where prophets are killed – where he knows he will be killed, even though he had desired to gather the people to protect them, "as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." It is interesting that Jesus speaks of himself as a hen protecting her chicks at the same time as he calls Herod a fox, an animal which would destroy the chicks if they were not protected. Jesus longs to protect people from all dangers, even while he journeys to Jerusalem where he will be in grave danger himself.

Jesus trusted God, his heavenly Father, completely. We see that in the events we will recall during Holy Week. Jesus trusted God. That trust was clearly not based on a life free of difficulties. Almost all the human beings involved in the last days of Jesus' life were, to one extent or another, untrustworthy. Yet Jesus believed that God was trustworthy. God did not spare him the cross, but God raised Jesus from death into eternal, resurrected life. Proof that God could and can be trusted after all.

What can we learn from this morning's scripture lessons? Faith is trust in God, a profound personal trust in God and God's promises. Faith in God does not shield us from life's difficulties or from attacks by other human beings. Doing good does not protect us from harm. Look at the example of Jesus. In the short term our lives may not work out well. But faith is about the long term, about trust that God will ultimately keep God's promises of new life, of healing and wholeness, of love.

Meanwhile, I think Jesus' reply to the message of Herod can guide us in our lives. "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work." I think we are meant to continue to do what Jesus calls us to do as long as we are able, in all the time we are given, with all the resources we have. We do what is good and loving because of our faith in God, our trust in God's direction, our belief that God's kingdom is a kingdom of love and justice and compassion and mercy. We live our lives as followers of Jesus, knowing – in the words of St. Paul in his letter to the church in Philippi – that "our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." In his holy name. Amen.