

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

March 16, 2025



JERUSALEM

the only place where prophets die?

by Drew Downs

Jesus says that it is *impossible* for a prophet to die outside of Jerusalem. This is a bit of rhetorical flourish, isn't it? It has to be! Jesus is our great reorienter, so he draws us away from thinking of the death of prophets as something neutral, passive, even accidental, when it is so very often the will of kings or the state to shut them up. We think of MLK's assassin, perhaps, but neglect the FBI's intentions to kill him, and the assassinations of Malcolm X and Fred Hampton.

The will to kill prophets doesn't come from the deranged lone wolves from random small towns — it begins and ends with the capital of power and the desire of monarchs to maintain control — always seeking a permanent majority and perpetual power.

The warning Jesus offers the Pharisees is not that the prophet is the source of any danger or that any of them can flee it — they are hens and the fox is in their house.

LENT

2025

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Penitence and Fasting

In the invitation to keep a holy Lent we share on Ash Wednesday, the liturgy invites us into a season of "penitence and fasting". For many, these churchy words buzz with excitement and resonate with purpose. But for many others, they aren't familiar or, let's be honest, all that useful. So what do we mean by penitence and fasting?

Penitence is an action or a set of behaviors one uses when seeking to make amends. It presumes, as we do in the church's common confession, that we've sinned and need to deal with it. Sin isn't a question of if, in other words, but when. And we start with the presumption that we all need to do this.

Fasting is a more familiar word, perhaps. We know it as self-denial, which we most often associate with a refrain from eating. But the spiritual purpose of fasting is not as widely considered. Fasting involves intention — and helps us focus on what truly matters. We are called to fast weekly on the Sabbath to restore our relationship to God, the world, our neighbors, and ourselves. In Lent, we make a season of fasting, to better connect with those very relationships.

The pairing of these two, penitence and fasting, should help us see them as connected, too. As a *posture* or a *way of experiencing the world* that helps us behave (practice) in ways that better embody our devotion to getting these relationships right, loving, and grace-filled. So our work this season isn't to withhold things from our lives for the sake of it, but for the sake of growth, connection, and becoming more who we are called to be.

With love,
Drew+

LENT

2025

FOR SUNDAY

Lent 2C

March 16, 2025

Collect

○ God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Luke 13:31-35

Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

LENT

Reflection

Some Pharisees warn Jesus about the treacherous king — he's planning to have him killed — and they tell him to get out of town. Herod's getting close. And Jesus seems to stand firm. He wants them to take a message back to Herod: Jesus has work to do. And Jerusalem is the city that kills its prophets.

I'm tempted to read this with some sympathy to these Pharisees, even as they are compelled to align with Herod who aligns with Rome. They seem to want to do the right thing here, at least warning Jesus of what is coming. What else are they supposed to do? They can't say no to the king, can they? There is a tension for many of us as the reader because we can sympathize with the situation and also reject it. That they feel trapped and we also can say, *but you should do this differently.*

This tension would be far less strong if we had read the passage before this: when Jesus responds to a question: "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able." For those that don't, they will try to get in, but can't. God will pretend not to know them, he argues. So we don't get to put off doing the right thing because we are compromised, or A right thing when we are in the midst of profound evil. "Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

In reading these passages together, I'm reminded of people who, like these Pharisees, hold positions of power and influence in our world, but don't use these positions to prevent the king's cruelty or protect the people — they merely warn of the evil to come. Jesus resists these Pharisees' hope that he will paint this as virtuous — instead implying that they'll be among those locked out. They are among the first who will be last. Because warning the prey isn't "good" enough.

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