

**The Second Sunday in Lent, March 16, 2025**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

**For a Rebellious People**

Luke 13:31–35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*


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Heading for the cross, Jesus lamented over the rebellion of Jerusalem, saying, “O JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM, THE CITY THAT KILLS THE PROPHETS AND STONES THOSE WHO ARE SENT TO HER! HOW OFTEN WOULD I HAVE GATHERED YOUR CHILDREN TOGETHER AS A HEN GATHERS HER BROOD UNDER HER WINGS, AND YOU WERE NOT WILLING!” (v 34). This is our text.

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It’s clear what kind of people Jesus is dealing with:

- a rebellious people
- stubborn and stiff-necked
- disrespectful
- doing what’s right in their own eyes
- walking in a way that isn’t good
- willfully unrepentant
- living with their belly as their god
- glorying in their shame
- setting their minds on earthly things
- not listening to the voice of their Father.

Does any of that sound familiar?

What else can Jesus do except lament and mourn over them? It breaks His heart even more than it breaks ours. We hear it in our Gospel reading: “O JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM, you rebellious people” (v 34). It’s more than an accusation. More than finger-pointing. It’s a lamentation. Think about that. Your God laments over your sin and rebellion. Jesus grieves and sorrows—not about the state of the culture or the current politics—but for His people. He laments their sin and hard-heartedness. He feels their rebellion—feels it like a nail driven through His wrist, like thorns pressed into His crown, like a spear jammed in His side.

FOR A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE,  
THE WEIGHT OF THE CROSS PRESSES DOWN ON JESUS.

I.

There’s an echo here of King David’s lament in Second Samuel 18. I encourage you to read it tonight at home. King David, God’s anointed, is estranged from Jerusalem. He’s been on the run, hunted, hounded, cursed by the very people God called him to serve.

Why? Because of his rebellious son, Absalom. The name Absalom means “father of peace,” but this Absalom had no sons and brought no peace. So what did he do? Absalom stole the hearts of the people by trickery. He had himself declared king. He seized the throne. And then he made war against his own father. Despite all that, King David’s orders were clear: “DEAL GENTLY FOR MY SAKE WITH THE YOUNG MAN ABSALOM” (2 Sam 18:5). To lose his son, his rebellious son, would be no victory. It would be a loss. How he longed for his son to be restored to him! How he wished for reconciliation and peace!

But Absalom was not willing. In the battle that followed, he got hung up by his vanity and pride—his hair. He had spent his life looking at himself, thinking about himself, serving himself. Do we do the same thing? But as I said, he got hung up on it. While RIDING ON HIS MULE, it WENT UNDER THE THICK BRANCHES OF A GREAT OAK, AND HIS HEAD CAUGHT FAST IN THE OAK because of his hair. Tangled in that tree HE WAS SUSPENDED BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH, WHILE THE MULE just kept on going (2 Sam 18:9). What a picture of rebellion—Absalom dangling in midair, head and hair entangled in branches, feet kicking wildly, nothing firm beneath, trapped! As it says in the law, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE” (Gal 3:13; Dt 21:23). Hung from a tree between heaven and earth, rebellious Absalom is under that curse. He dies with a javelin thrust to the heart.

When the rebel leader is killed and the rebellion ended, you would expect a celebration, shouts of joy, a victory parade. But that’s not how David responds. The death of this rebel brings no joy. THE KING WAS DEEPLY MOVED AND WENT UP TO THE CHAMBER OVER THE GATE AND WEPT. AND AS HE WENT, HE lamented and SAID, “O MY SON ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON ABSALOM! WOULD THAT I HAD DIED INSTEAD OF YOU, O ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON!” (2 Sam 18:33). David grieves for his dead, rebellious son. O Absalom, Absalom!

## II.

Jesus is DESCENDED FROM that same DAVID ACCORDING TO THE FLESH (Rom 1:3). Like Absalom then, He’s a son of David. *The Son of David*. At the same time, He’s also the true Son of God. When Jesus CAME INTO THE WORLD, HE SAID to His Father, “A BODY HAVE YOU PREPARED FOR ME. . . . I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD” (Heb 10:5). The Father sends His beloved Son. Sends Him behind enemy lines. Sends Him right into the midst of the rebels. To us rebels.

What is the Father’s will? The Father doesn’t desire the death of the sinner. He doesn’t want the execution of those in rebellion. He has no wish to curse or condemn those who are stubborn and stiff-necked. Quite the opposite. He DESIRES ALL PEOPLE TO BE

SAVED AND TO COME TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH (1 Tim 2:4). He would not have any be lost, but rather that in repentance we turn and believe.

So Jesus said (in words familiar from the hymn “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth,” *LSB* 438:3),

“Yes, Father, yes, most willingly  
I’ll bear what you command Me.  
My will conforms to Your decree,  
I’ll do what You have asked Me.”

He walked among the rebels. He urged them to lay down their arms. He taught them about the kingdom and invited them to enter it. He offered them true peace and a place like His— seats at the table as sons of the Father. Of rebellious Jerusalem, He said, “HOW OFTEN WOULD I HAVE GATHERED YOUR CHILDREN TOGETHER AS A HEN GATHERS HER BROOD UNDER HER WINGS,” like little chicks (v 34). But they would not.

So He opened His wings even further. He even **KNELT** in a garden—and remember it was in a garden that the rebellion first broke out—He **KNELT AND PRAYED**: “FATHER, IF YOU’RE WILLING, REMOVE THIS CUP FROM ME. NEVERTHELESS, NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS, BE DONE” (Luke 22:42). Thy will be done. And He meant it. He meant it with every fiber of His being, with every drop of His innocent blood. It was His mission, and He chose to accept it.

King David grieved over his son Absalom. He grieved, but he couldn’t make it right. He couldn’t atone for his son’s sins. He couldn’t rescue his son from death and eternal damnation. Jesus, too, laments those in rebellion. But He went a step farther than David. He didn’t just say, “WOULD THAT I HAD DIED INSTEAD OF YOU, O rebel and villain.” He actually did it. He offered Himself. Look! The faithful Son is treated like a rebel. He hangs between heaven and earth in the place of every rebellious son. He is the new, the greater, the obedient yet crucified Absalom. In His own body, He makes atonement. He stages the greatest rescue ever. He says, “Let the rebel go. Take Me. I die instead of you.”

And this took place just outside Jerusalem. The name Jerusalem is both ironic and prophetic. It means “The Lord will provide peace.” It’s ironic because Jerusalem may be the least peaceful place on earth. It’s **THE CITY THAT KILLS THE PROPHETS AND STONES THOSE SENT TO HER** (v 34). And yet it’s prophetic—for though it takes the cross, the full weight of the cross falling on Jesus, the Lord will indeed provide peace. **PEACE IN HEAVEN AND GLORY IN THE HIGHEST** (Luke 19:38). If the disciples were silent, **THE VERY STONES WOULD CRY OUT** (Luke 19:40).

## III.

How, then, will a rebellious people respond to this, to the death of God's own beloved Son? St. Peter stood before a great crowd on Pentecost and spoke the truth: "LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL THEREFORE KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT GOD HAS MADE HIM BOTH LORD AND CHRIST, THIS JESUS—the true Son of David — WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED" (Acts 2:36). Are there ways we resist Jesus? Are there areas of our lives in which we refuse His help? Do we scurry away from the shelter of His wings and seek to make peace with the world? Will we insist on going our own way and so crucify Him again? Will we CONTINUE IN SIN THAT GRACE MAY ABOUND (Rom 6:1)? How could we!

Jesus came that He might bring MANY SONS TO GLORY (Heb 2:10). He's not ASHAMED TO CALL us his BROTHERS (Heb 2:11). He was willing all the way to the cross, so that those who WERE NOT WILLING might turn from their sinful ways and live. HE HIMSELF IS OUR PEACE (Eph 2:14).

Jesus came—comes even now—to gather us to Himself. So shelter under His wings, under the protection of His forgiveness. Lower your defenses. Lay down your arms. Abandon your rebellion. Stop running. Know His love, the height and depth and warmth of His love. Rest on the solid ground beneath His cross.

Now we can't help cheeping—in words that we'll sing soon:

*Here might I stay and sing, / No story so divine!  
Never was love, dear King, / Never was grief like Thine  
This is my Friend, / In whose sweet praise  
I all my days / Could gladly spend!  
(LSB 430:7)*

Out of love for you, the weight of the cross pressed down on Jesus. We look to Him and say, BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD (v 35)!

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As St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi: THEREFORE, MY BROTHERS, WHOM I LOVE AND LONG FOR, MY JOY AND CROWN, STAND FIRM THUS IN THE LORD, MY BELOVED.

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*Phil 4:1*