



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 2

March 16, 2025

Jerusalem, Jerusalem

Luke 13:31-35

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to [Jesus], "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³²And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. ³³Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' ³⁴O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! ³⁵Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

In Scripture, the repeating of a proper name conveys a particular meaning and applies to the immediate context. For example, when Moses turned aside to see the burning bush, "God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' (Ex. 3:4). Here the doubling of the name is meant to warn and to reveal. "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (3:5).

The boy Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the Ark of God was. And the LORD called, "Samuel, Samuel" (1 Sam. 3:10). On this occasion the words are repeated to gain the attention of the future prophet of God. When the sister of Mary and Lazarus was too occupied with serving and had no time for hearing the Word, Jesus admonished her, saying, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary" (Luke 10:41). On the night of His betrayal, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31).

The son of David hung on a tree, his body pierced three times. These were wounds that cut him to the heart. Below him stood soldiers who surrounded him and struck him. When the word of his death reached his father, King David cried out, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 18:35). Beloved, can't you hear the hurt and pain and sorrow? "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 19:4)?

This is the lament of Jesus as He beholds before Him the City of David, the abandoned Temple, and the place where prophets are killed.

Can't you hear the heart of God in these words recorded by the evangelist? It's an



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expression of the inmost desire of God recorded by the Prophet Ezekiel: "As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ez. 33:11). This groaning is echoed in the epistle of the Apostle Paul who writes that God: "Desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

This Divine repetition of words is all the more amazing because of what Jesus says after them. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34). God, in His mercy, earnestly desired not to render the judgment that the city deserved. Even though they had killed the prophets, even though they had stoned those who were sent to them, the LORD God would still have gathered the children of the city together. After centuries of rejecting the Word and silencing His Prophets, Jerusalem had earned the moniker: "Place where prophets and apostles are killed." In fact, Jesus had just stated that "it cannot be that a prophet should perish *away* from Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33).

"How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34). Did you notice that the day of grace had passed for the city? "How often *would I have gathered . . .*" There comes a time for a city, a season for a congregation, a moment for an individual, when the opportunity for repentance and salvation has passed. At that time – a time known only to God – the Lord no longer visits in mercy, peace, and grace, but comes instead in judgment, dread, and abandonment. In the end, what such a city, congregation, or individual has insisted upon is realized; they didn't want God butting His divine nose into their life, so He doesn't. But they realize too late that this is not the blessing they thought it would be.

That's what happened in the synagogue at Nazareth when those in attendance rose up and forced Jesus out of their midst. They sought to rid themselves of Him and the result was that they no longer had Jesus among them and the Lord was no longer graciously present with them. Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets, will compel Jesus *the* Prophet to go outside the gates of the holy city and to a cursed hill where they will crucify Him. Thus they no longer have Him in their city and their ears can't even hear His lament: "Jerusalem, O Jerusalem!"

The congregation that silences the Word by rejecting a faithful pastor will get what they seek. Though they gather, though they are religious, and though they may be zealous, they no longer have a faithful shepherd to feed and nurture them with the Word and Sacrament. Thank God we don't have that situation here at Trinity, at least not at this time. But, we need to be vigilant and take heed not to depart from being the Bride of Christ – "the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Here's the scary thing, beloved: Those who fall away don't even know it's happening; they're just not able



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to hear anymore the divine lament of Jesus.

Whether by carelessness, taking offence, or through sinful pride, they have silenced the Lord by ignoring His Word and neglecting to meet together in the holy place where the Lord is present with His people, and they will discover, either in this life or on the Last Day, that they have forsaken the Word of forgiveness and therefore have no place at the Lord's banquet. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!"

Dear brothers and sisters, be assured that this is not the way Jesus wants things to be. "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken" (Luke 13:34). The consequences of impenitence are dreadful.

You see, in our relationship to God there will be a releasing, a separating, of one of two kinds: by grace through faith you will be separated from your sins, forgiven and pardoned, the punishment for them having already been suffered by the Son of God on the cross in your behalf; *or*, on account of your unbelief you will be separated from God, and you will have to bear your own sins before Him on the Day of Judgment. So, even in this life, there will be a releasing of one sort or the other – either forgiveness for your sins, or the departure of God's merciful and gracious presence. Which, do you suppose, is better? "O impenitent, impenitent! Behold, you are forsaken!"

Sometimes, congregations permit false doctrine to be taught and promoted through false practices. This, too, will incur judgment. To them the LORD says: "When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood" (Isaiah 1:15). Pray, beloved, that we may not depart from the truth, thereby causing this house to be forsaken by God.

For Jerusalem it was too late. The day of grace had passed. The Lord had departed from the temple, leaving Jesus to lament: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Luke 13:34-35).

Yes, Jesus would return to Jerusalem. It would be on Palm Sunday as foretold by the Prophet Zechariah, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zec. 9:9). So yes, Jesus would visit the temple again, leading the children in, as they sang their hosannas to the Lord. But He would wind His way through the streets of the city one last time, when He would follow Simon of Cyrene on the way to Golgotha, the Hill of the Skull. On this trek, He would turn to the women lamenting Him and say to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do



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not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke 23:28).

Think about it: There He was, walking that way of sorrows, carrying not only a splintery, rough-hewn cross, but your sins and mine on His beaten, bloody, scourge-shredded back. Why? What was it all about? Why lament over Jerusalem? Why lament over you? Why carry other peoples' sins and suffer other peoples' punishment for them? Because He still wants to gather you in His arms of mercy. His heart still pines for you, as did David's over his son Absalom. "Would that I had died instead of you." And so He did.

Behold, the Son of David hung on a tree, His body pierced three times. These were wounds that cut Him to the heart. Below Him stood soldiers who surrounded Him and pierced Him. "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' He said. "'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Mark 15:34). He was abandoned on that cross so that you don't have to be. Unless you insist. Please don't. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen