

# The Cross is Steady

*A sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent, 2025*

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*Being a disciple of Jesus means that we will find ourselves in the same places Jesus goes. Alongside the afflicted, the hurting, the grieving, and in the messiest places human life has to offer. This is where grace, mercy, and healing are needed, so they are where God works. How are we to survive in the midst of such chaos and storm?*

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Jerusalem is the centre of the world. The Romans may think otherwise, but Jesus, John the Baptist, the disciples, and all of the Judeans know the truth: Jerusalem is the centre of the world. In the centre of this great, busy city is the temple to which pilgrims flock for festivals every year, singing psalms as they travel. And in the centre of the temple is a silent, empty space, the holy of holies. It is here that God holds a part of creation still and quiet, whilst all around it is noise and change. It is here that God makes and remakes the creation. Jerusalem is the centre of the world.

Karen Armstrong, in her pitch for the Charter for Compassion project, referred to Jerusalem as “that tortured city”. A difficult description to hear, but, looking at the history of this city, it seems more accurate than we might like. King David declared Jerusalem the capital of his nation around 1,000 BC. Since then it has known rule by Babylon, Persia, Alexander the Great, Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties, Rome, Persia (again), Byzantium, Umayyads, Abassids, European crusaders, Saladin, European crusaders (again) the Caliphate, Ottomans, and all of the

claims made in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For three of the world’s largest religions, Jerusalem is the holiest city in the world. In spite of their high value on peace, cooperation, and love of neighbour, conflict seems to roil around it without ceasing.

Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem and is making his way toward the conflict and sacrifice that await him within its ancient walls. Plenty of people try to dissuade him from the path. His disciples are worried for him and his predictions about the suffering that awaits him there. Jesus knows that his ultimate conflict is centred on Jerusalem and he despairs for the cycle of strife between the leaders of that city and God. He proceeds on this road, obedient to God’s will, toward Jerusalem, who kills her prophets and stones the ones sent to her. In that beautiful image of a mother hen gathering chicks under wings, Jesus longs to offer care and healing to Jerusalem’s children but her leaders are not willing.

## THE RETURN OF THE KING

The Pharisees approach Jesus and warn him against approaching the city. Herod is out for his life. For all of their disagreements with Jesus about theology and application of the Law, the Pharisees are not Roman collaborators or friends of Herod. They are those who live in tight adherence to the law of the covenant and it does not allow for worship of a foreign emperor claiming godhood. On this point, the Pharisees and Jesus are in agreement. Far from the majestic, regal lion associated with powerful, successful rulers, Jesus paints Herod as a fox. Also a predator, but just as happy to scavenge the carrion of another hunter as it is to hunt its own prey. He gives the Pharisees a message for

Herod, but they are not going anywhere near the palace as long as it is a fox's den.

With a string of puppet-kings and collaborating leaders, Jesus reminds Jerusalem's leaders of the words of Jeremiah: "Your house is left to you." The city will be a desolation, uninhabited in a desert. At the same time, Jesus casts himself in the role of the one who comes, met with the royal welcome of "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." Others have wondered if Jesus would be the Messiah<sup>1</sup> and hope that he will spell the end of generations of false rulers installed after sieges and destruction. Perhaps this is the moment when the peace of Jerusalem descends and she is given her due glory. This new hope will build, the confrontations will become more exciting, the zealots will begin to gather, and it will all seem to come crashing down at Golgotha.

#### THE EYE OF THE STORM

Of course, when Jesus is crucified, God is making and remaking the creation. Jesus breathes his last and the still, quiet place in the centre of the world is remade in the midst of chaos, despair, grief, and loss. This truth is so profound, the Carthusian order made it their motto: *Stat crux dum volvitur orbis*, the cross is steady while the world turns. At the height of conflict in a tortured city, the hopes of those longing for liberation from their oppressors seem dashed. In this moment, God takes a symbol of shameful death, heaped with fear-fueled rage, and calls a halt to it all.

The power of sin and death is ended at a place of execution. The tomb is no longer the final destination for the dead, but the gateway to eternal life. The place of greatest upset and tur-

moil has been made the calm, quiet, still centre through the presence of God's outpouring of love, grace, and mercy.

#### STAND FIRM IN THE LORD

For those who come to our faith from the broader world, putting our hope and trust in a man who died and the instrument that killed him seems folly. Life in Christ is not always easy. As we are told in the Gospel, Jesus spends most of his time in difficult places. On the margins of society, with the untouchables of his world, in the noisiest, messiest, most chaotic of circumstances. When we are baptized and join the Body of Christ, we commit ourselves to going where Jesus goes. As Rowan Williams says, we cannot enter the waters of the Jordan and expect that we will not stir up any mud from the riverbed.

Today's gospel portion is a reminder to us that, no matter how muddy, noisy, chaotic, and difficult our circumstances become, if we stand firm in our faith in Jesus, we will find the calm and quiet that we seek. We will find the stable centre in the midst of the storm. Even when we find ourselves at the foot of the Cross, we find ourselves with God at the centre of the world.

<sup>1</sup>Luke 3:16; 7:19