

# Sermon Note: Prayers of the People

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

### Introduction

As we near the end of our Worship with Rejoicing series, we turn our focus to the “Prayers of the People.” In our scripture passage, we encounter David in a moment of deep sorrow as he learns of the death of his son Absalom. This passage reveals the profound emotions that prayer can express—anguish, grief, and the weight of intercession. It reminds us that prayer is not just about the words we speak but also about the deep cries of our hearts. As Paul reminds us in Romans 8, sometimes our prayers are even wordless like unexpressed groans.

### Illustration Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5v5DOEF45E>

In the 1997 film, *The Apostle*, Sonny (played by Robert Duvall) shares his exasperation with a heartfelt—and very loud—prayer.

### Video Discussion Questions

1. What does Sonny’s prayer reveal about his relationship with God?
2. How does this scene reflect the emotions David might have felt upon hearing of Absalom’s death?
3. How can we incorporate this kind of honest, passionate prayer into our own lives, especially when we are interceding for others?
4. How does Sonny’s prayer life reflect the idea of perseverance in faith, even when facing personal turmoil?
5. What does this scene teach us about the importance of bringing our true selves before God in prayer, without holding back our emotions or struggles?

### 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33 (NRSVue)

<sup>5</sup>The king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.” And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom.

<sup>6</sup>So the army went out into the field against Israel, and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup>The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. <sup>8</sup>The battle spread over the face of all the country, and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword.

<sup>9</sup>Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.

<sup>15</sup>And ten young men, Joab’s armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him.

<sup>31</sup>Then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, “Good tidings for my lord the king! For the Lord has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you.” <sup>32</sup>The king said to the

Cushite, “Is it well with the young man Absalom?” The Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to do you harm be like that young man.”

<sup>33</sup>The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept, and as he went he said, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

### **Scripture Discussion Questions**

1. What were King David’s instructions to his commanders regarding Absalom?
2. What happened to Absalom during the battle?
3. How did Joab and his men respond when they found Absalom hanging in the tree?
4. What do David’s instructions to his commanders and his reaction to Absalom’s death reveal about his character?
5. Rev. Dr. Derek Weber writes: “The prayers of the people invite us to respond to the complicated and often unknown challenges facing our neighbors in the pews, down the street, and around the world. Few simple solutions exist to the complex problems that plague our lives, whether we’re talking about war among nations, conflicts within families, or battles being waged in individual hearts. Whether our neighborhoods are hungry for food, a living wage, or unconditional love, we must grapple with the problems. And yet, no matter the enormity of the challenges we face, grace abounds again and again. The prayers of the people remind us that when we don’t know what to do or we are afraid to acknowledge the suffering around us, we begin with prayer; and not just individual prayer—corporate prayer. We don’t have to know the details of our neighbors’ struggles to gather together and offer one another grace through prayer.” What does the phrase “prayers of the people” mean to you?
6. Consider a time when you or your community faced a difficult challenge and turned to corporate prayer for guidance and support. How did you feel doing this? Did anything change related to the challenge (how it was faced, it was resolved nor not resolved, etc.)
7. Who do you think needs you to pray for them this week?

### **Weekly Action**

This week, I invite you to engage deeply in prayer, not only for your own needs but also for those around you. Take time to pray for the people in your life—your family, friends, community, and even those you may struggle with. Allow your prayers to be honest and heartfelt, trusting that God hears the cries of your heart just as God heard David’s.

### **Prayer**

Today, I/we pray for the people of this congregation... for those who suffer and those in trouble... for the concerns of this local community... for the world, its peoples, and its leaders... for the earth you have given to our care... for the Church universal—its leaders, its members, and its mission... in communion with the saints.... May God’s infinite grace be revealed in all of these circumstances, and may the light of God’s love overshadow all experiences of darkness. Amen.