

SERMON MARK 14 THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

March 13, 2022

Last Sunday, we began our study of Adam Hamilton's book, *24 Hours That Changed the World*, with a discussion on the Lord's Supper. This morning, let's pick-up the story with Jesus and the disciples leaving the Upper Room after the meal, and heading for the Garden of Gethsemane as recorded in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark verse 26 and then the events in the garden in verses 32 through 52.

Read Mark 14:26, 32-52

Jesus and His disciples conclude the Passover meal by singing a hymn. This hymn is part of the Seder Meal and is called Hallel, a word meaning "praise;" which is the root word of "hallelujah." The hymn is composed of selected verses from Psalm 113 to Psalm 118. We know that Jesus frequently quoted the psalms during His ministry. He taught from them, sang them at the Last Supper, and prayed from them as He died on the cross. The psalms were an important part of His spiritual life. Like Jesus, we too can gain strength, encouragement and assurance from reading the psalms.

After leaving the Upper Room, Jesus led the disciples through the Kidron Valley. In the Gospel of John, we are told that they passed through the ancient vineyards that line the terraces along the sides of the valley. Here Jesus stopped and announced that He was the True Vine and that if we are to bear fruit we must be connected to Him. According to the prophesy of Joel, this is the valley where all the nations of the world will be gathered one day to be judged by the One who is leading the disciples this night.

As they walked through the night with the torches guiding the way, Jesus had to be thinking about what was going to happen next. He knew that Judas had already gone to get the guards from the High Priest to arrest Him. Judas knew where they going because the Gospels of Luke and John tell us that Jesus often went to this garden to pray. In addition, as we discussed last Sunday, Peter would deny knowing Him three times before the night is over and the rest of the disciples will desert Him for fear of also being arrested by the guards. This knowledge of being betrayed, denied and deserted by His closest friends had to add to the anxiety that Jesus was experiencing on this night.

At the base of the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Kidron Valley, sits a grove of olive trees called the Garden of Gethsemane. The word "Gethsemane" means "olive oil press." The Gospel of John is the only one that describes the place where Jesus prayed as a "garden." John is also the only one who tells us that the tomb where Jesus was buried was in a garden and that when Mary Magdalene first saw the Risen Christ; she thought that He was a gardener.

This makes you wonder if John is trying to make a connection between what Jesus is experiencing in the Garden of Gethsemane with what happened centuries before in the Garden of Eden. As Adam Hamilton notes in his book, God was the gardener who planted the Garden of Eden. And it was in that garden that Adam and Eve disobeyed God and Paradise was lost. John wants us to recognize that Jesus, unlike Adam, would be faithful to God. John also wants us to see that what Jesus was about to do was intended to address, and reverse, the effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience; to re-establish our broken relationship with God.

When they get to the garden, Jesus divides His disciples into two groups asking each group to pray for Him. Now He didn't initially tell them what to pray for, but they had to sense the tension that was in His voice. They knew that the religious leaders were upset with Jesus, and we can assume that Jesus' words at supper were still on their minds. What did He mean by "this is my body and this is the blood of the new covenant poured out for many?" They had to sense that something unusual was about to happen.

It appears that Jesus leaves the majority of the disciples at the entrance to the garden and then takes Peter, James and John a little farther into the garden with Him. These three had been in Jesus' inner circle; they were the closest to Him and thus He shared His concern with them. We all need some close friends to share our feelings with. We each need our Peter, James and John. And often, all we need for them to do is to be there for us, not saying anything, but just listening and bringing us comfort by their presence.

Then Jesus goes a short distance away, falls on the ground and prays. The passage from Mark states: "He prayed that, if possible, He might be spared the time of suffering." The other gospels and translations state it as "may this cup be taken from me." The *Message* paraphrases this verse as follows: "Papa, Father, you can – can't you – get me out of this. Take this cup away from me." In other words, is there another way without the rejection, humiliation, torture, pain and death? Luke tells us that Jesus prayed so hard that His sweat was like drops of blood.

Now I don't know how you interpret this prayer of Jesus, or if you have ever closely examined it. But the idea that Jesus was in anguish, pleading with God, is unsettling to some Christians. For some, the scene evokes great compassion. For others, the image of Jesus asking God to take away the cup of suffering from Him, and His apparent anxiety over the Crucifixion seems to be a lack of faith. They would perhaps expect Jesus to face His torture and death without any fear or hesitation.

Jesus may have experienced this anguish because the devil was tempting Him again. As you remember the devil tempted Jesus at the beginning of His ministry in the wilderness for forty days following His baptism. Luke concludes his account of this initial temptation by stating:

“After finishing every temptation, the devil left Jesus until a more opportune time.” Now some of us may have the misconception that Jesus was only tempted once in His life here on earth, but that is totally wrong. He faced temptation every day just like you and I do.

As Jesus knelt alone in the quiet of the garden, maybe His mind wandered and He heard the devil whispering as he did in the Garden of Eden: “Did God really intend for you to suffer and die? Surely you don’t believe that if you die, anything will change? What good are you when you are dead?” Maybe the tempter whispered: “Are you sure that there’s not another way? You’re only 33! You’ve got so much more to live for. Flee now; you still have time! Simply tell the religious leaders what they want to hear, and they will let you go! Do you really believe that this band of misfits you call disciples can carry on your mission? Look at them – they’re sleeping! It’s not too late. Run Jesus, run!” While the devil did not know the plans that God had for Jesus, he still opposed God at every opportunity.

In his book, Adam Hamilton points out that another possible explanation for Jesus’ anguish is that He might have been concerned about what was going to happen to Jerusalem. If Jesus died at the hands of the religious leaders, most Jews would not see Him as the true Messiah. They would continue to search for someone to fulfill their expectations; to be the warrior king who would overthrow the hated Romans and re-establish the Jewish nation to its past glory and prestige.

As a matter of fact in just thirty years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, a man came forward as a military messiah and led the people against the Romans. However, they were no match for the Roman Empire; between AD 66 and 73, over a million Jews were killed. Jerusalem was laid to rubble, and the Temple was destroyed and has never been rebuilt. Jesus knew this would happen if He was crucified. As He prayed in the garden, He could see Jerusalem and the Temple. Was the fate of this city and Temple heavy on His heart that night? Remember His reaction a few days earlier as He rode into the city from the Mount of Olives as recorded in Luke: “amidst all the shouts of hosanna, Jesus wept and predicted the destruction of Jerusalem.” He might have been thinking, was this really part of God’s plan, to destroy His Holy City?

However, I believe the real reason for Jesus’ anguish and His request that this cup of suffering be taken away from Him is that He was human. He came to be one of us and thus He had the same fears, emotions and pains that we all experience in life. Who of us wants to die at the young age of 33 with most of our life ahead of us? How would you feel if you knew that within a few hours you would be tortured; publicly humiliated; and then subjected to one of the cruelest, most inhumane and painful forms of capital punishments ever devised by man?

I believe that in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus showed us that He was truly human and thus, He can relate to all that we suffer and deal with in life. He has walked in our shoes and understands the demands and temptations that we face each and every day. Therefore He can intercede on our behalf before the Father. In our Responsive Reading, the writer of Hebrews may have been thinking about this when he wrote in the fourth chapter: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." As the hymn we sang earlier states: "What a friend we have in Jesus."

In the garden, Jesus kneels before His Father and prays: "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup of suffering from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." In other words: "Not what I want, but what you want." Jesus took a step of faith, trusting in His Father. Throughout His life Jesus had followed God's plan, and at this moment He agrees to see it through to fulfillment. This prayer in the garden relieved Jesus of anxiety, reaffirmed His trust in God, and enabled Him to face the cross.

As we discussed earlier, in his gospel, the Apostle John sees a connection between the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane. In one garden, Adam and Eve were warned that death would come if they disobeyed; yet they still could not resist the forbidden fruit. In the other garden, Jesus was told He could avoid death if He would only disobey. Look at the difference in the responses. In the first garden Adam said: "Not **thy** will, but **mine** be done;" and Paradise was lost. In the second garden, as the disciples slept and the Temple guards approached, Jesus prayed the greatest prayer: "Not **my** will, but **thy** will be done." Jesus' prayer was essential to restoring the broken relationship between God and His children that was lost in the Garden of Eden.

On this night Jesus faced a major decision, one that would lead to the cross. He struggled with what He believed to be the will of God. Other characters in the Bible have had similar struggles. As we discussed a few weeks ago, when God called Moses from a burning bush to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, Moses came up with excuse after excuse. When God called Jonah to go to Nineveh, he initially refused and became fish bait.

Have you ever found yourself struggling with God? Was there ever a path that God wanted you to take but you took a different one? Was there a risk that seemed too great or a price that seemed too high? Have you ever prayed like Moses: "Lord, send someone else or let someone else do it?" Have you ever run with Jonah in the opposite direction from where God was calling you to go? Have you ever knelt with Jesus in the garden, praying: "Father, remove this cup from me?"

Pursuing God's will can be costly at times. Jesus said: "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me." Are you willing, even reluctantly, to go where God calls and do what God asks, regardless of the cost? After arguing with the Lord, Moses relented and returned to Egypt, risking death to lead the Israelites to freedom. Jonah, in the belly of the great fish, finally agreed: "Okay, I will go!" And Jesus, despite praying for the cup to pass from Him, accepted it, laying down His life according to God's divine plan.

What is God calling you to do? Is it some new ministry? Is He nudging you to invite someone to church or to share your love of Jesus Christ with a friend, neighbor or family member? Are you seeking your will or God's will? Are you willing to let God use you to build His kingdom? The key is not what we can do for God, but what God can do **through** us!

Wherever we are feeling God calling us this morning, may we all respond as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not what I want, but what you want, Lord." As I struggle each day to see where God is leading me and to surrender my life to Him, I recite a shorten version of the Wesley Covenant Prayer during my morning quiet time. Please join me in this prayer which is on the screen and printed on the bulletin insert:

"Let me be your servant, under your command. I will no longer be my own. I will give up myself to your will in all things. Lord, make me to what you will. I put myself fully into your hands: put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and with a willing heart give it all to your pleasure and disposal. Amen"