

The Garden of Gethsemane

Opening Prayer:

Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
The Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.
With the Lord on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?...
I shall not die, but I shall live,
And recount the deeds of the Lord...
I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
But the Lord helped me.
The Lord is my strength and my might;
He has become my salvation.

(Psalm 25:1-2, 16-18)

Scripture Reading:

Mark 14:26, 32-42

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives... They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Video Presentation – Session 2 “The Garden of Gethsemane”*Key Insights:*

- ✓ Approaching the Holy Land as a pilgrim allows you to place yourself in the story, to imagine yourself trying to stay awake under an olive tree, or to kneel at the very place Christ may have thrown himself on the ground in agony.
- ✓ Jesus began his public ministry by being tempted by the devil. Here in the garden, Jesus was tempted once again: “You don’t have to suffer. You don’t have to die. Just run!”
- ✓ The Church of All Nations was designed to take pilgrims back to that night in the garden. The interior is dark. The ceiling is full of stars. Below a large mosaic of Christ kneeling in prayer is a large rock that pilgrims can kneel before and touch.
- ✓ In both the garden of Eden and the garden of Gethsemane, the crucial question was, “God’s will or not?”

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) When have you been unable to “stay awake,” pay attention, or follow through when you felt Jesus most needed you?
- 2) What significance do you see in the fact that two of the Bible’s most profound temptation stories take place in a garden?
- 3) When in your experience of faith have you heard the whispered temptation, “Just run!”? How did you respond?
- 4) What words would you want to pray if you were kneeling, right now, before the stone in the Church of All Nations?

Book Discussion:

The idea that Jesus was in anguish, pleading with God, is unsettling to many Christians. For some, the scene evokes great compassion. For others, the image of Jesus asking God to take the cup of suffering from him and his seeming anxiety over the Crucifixion seems to lack nobility and courage. For still others, the image may even appear to indicate a lack of faith. They would perhaps expect Jesus to face his torture and death without agitation or fear. Interestingly, Luke reduces this story by half and seems to minimize Jesus’ anguish. John does not include the story of Jesus’ anguish at all. (pg. 37)

- How does the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus’ anguish in the garden of Gethsemane inform or affect your understanding of who Jesus is?

While we speak of Jesus bearing the sins of the world on the cross, the idea is not that the Father literally covered Jesus with the world’s sins. The idea is that the punishment those sins merited was voluntarily taken by Jesus on the cross (He suffered for sins he did commit.) in order to reconcile us to God. There was no reason for the Father to turn away. This was, in fact, the greatest act of sacrificial love imaginable and part of God’s own plan. God did not look away but instead looked with love and

anguish at the suffering of his Son. God was grieved by it, seeing in the suffering and death of Jesus his Son's effort to draw the world to God. By watching this act, the Father joined in the suffering of the Son during those hours on the cross. *(pg. 38)*

- When have you been comforted by the belief that God suffers and grieves with you even as God grieved over Jesus as he suffered on the cross?

Each of us knows what it is like to sense that God wants us to do something we do not want to do. We may feel called to take on a new ministry, to leave behind an unhealthy relationship, or to give a sacrificial gift to an organization. It may be a short-term or long-term call to the mission field, or it could be a call to service and love others outside our comfort zone.

One of my parishioners felt called to teach the Alpha course, an introduction to Christian faith, in a federal penitentiary; but the first time she approached the security gates and barbed-wire fencing at Leavenworth Penitentiary and then entered to meet the federal parishioners, she was terrified and wanted to back out. Another parishioner felt God called her to leave her corporate job to go into the mission field in Honduras. Another felt compelled to start a ministry to the homeless. Still another was certain God was calling him to adopt a child from foster care.

Each of these people had moments of anxiety related to answering God's call; and each ultimately prayed, as Jesus prayed, "Not what I want, but what you want." This prayer captured the essence of complete trust. It is bold enough to lay before God our desires and humble and obedient enough to reassert that we will do whatever God calls us to do, no matter the cost. *(pgs. 41-42)*

- Recall a time when you experienced anxiety over responding to God's call to do something you did not want to do. How did you finally come to the point (if you did) of saying, "Not what I want, but what you want?"

Wrapping Up:

Imagine that you are Judas. You have just kissed your friend Jesus for the last time, and in so doing you have condemned him to death. You can see the soldiers shoving Jesus on ahead of them, out of the garden. You are alone. Your fellow disciples have fled into the night. You collapse against the trunk of the olive tree. You can see the impressions on the ground where Jesus must have been praying. What do you feel now?

Closing Prayer:

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20-21)

For Further Study

Bible Study and Discussion

Joel 2:28-3:12

- The prophet Joel describes God's final judgment of the nations as taking place in the same area where Jesus journeyed on his way to Gethsemane and ultimately to the cross. What insights does that connection give you as you consider Jesus' agonizing over his mission in Gethsemane?

Psalms 116

- Remember that this is one of the psalms traditionally sung after the Passover meal. Imagine Jesus singing the psalm and coming to verse 13: "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." What do you think Jesus understood this to mean for him?

Luke 5:1-13

- What connections do you see between Jesus' three temptations in the wilderness and his three prayers at Gethsemane?