

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

February 21, 2016

“The Garden of Gethsemane”

“24 Hours That Changed the World” part 2

Mark 14:26-50

(Intro Video)

Throughout Lent we are walking through the 24 hours of Jesus’ life that led up to the crucifixion and Easter Sunday. This is a powerful story that has literally changed the world, and I have been borrowing material from Adam Hamilton to help us understand what this story means for us today.

I invite you to pray with me as we continue to look at this story and what God is asking us to do. If you are comfortable, I invite you to open your hands as we pray, ready to receive God’s blessing for us all.

Holy, Living God, guide us in these precious moments now. Let the words of my mouth and the mediations of my heart be acceptable in your sight. Breathe your Holy Spirit on us all, that we can be renewed and enter the story of your salvation. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever had times of agony? Ever have nights when something is upsetting you, and you can’t fall asleep, even though you are emotionally and spiritually exhausted? It’s embarrassing to admit, but the first time I really remember having a horrible night like that was in college, when I was dumped. Looking back on that now, I’m glad that happened, but at the time, it was awful. I can also remember when my grandfather died, and the raw emotion I felt. I remember lying awake the night I lost my job for the first time, gripped by the fear of not knowing what would happen next.

Those nights drove me to an intense form of prayer beyond the normal “God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food.” Maybe you’ve felt that burdened, too. You know the hurt, the pain, the abandonment that drives you to your knees, and you cry out, “Why, God? Why?” Ever had those nights?

The thing is, we live in a world that is both beautiful and yet broken. No one is a stranger to disappointment. We’ve all had lost opportunities. We’ve all had friends let us down. I wish it weren’t so, but we know we live in a time when those we should trust most, like our government or even our church leaders, can fail us and betray us. We wrestle with addiction, dysfunction. And in those times of deep need, we need to know, “God, where are you?”

Have you ever wondered what it really means to pray? We often use the Lord’s Prayer, with the phrase, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” What does that mean? What is “God’s will”? We know that sin is not the will of God. Sin is the complete opposite. In fact, it is times when we are confronted with sin – be it our own or the sins of others – that we are compelled to pray for release. But how do we know that we are praying, “Thy will be done,” and not “my will be done”?

The Bible tells us that Jesus never sinned (2nd Corinthians 5:21), so any prayer that he prayed would have been the perfect will of God. I want us to look closely at this story of the Garden of Gethsemane, and see how Jesus prayed, so that we have a glimpse of how we should pray.

This scripture comes in three parts: Jesus in the valley, Jesus praying in the garden, and Jesus is arrested. Here is another video to help set the scene for you.

This is a view of the Kidron Valley, between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Remember, last week we learned that Jesus and his disciples ate the

Passover Meal in a large upper room in Jerusalem. So, sometime around midnight, Jesus and the disciples were walking down this path, out of the city, to a special garden, where Jesus loved to pray.

I want to draw your attention to the tombs. Maybe they don't look so scary in the daylight, but in the dark, lit only by a few torches and maybe some moonlight, they would have been gloomy. Kind of sets the mood, doesn't it? This is where Jesus tells his disciples, they will desert him. As Jesus is walking past these tombs, he hears his followers promise to die for him. But Jesus knew the truth: they would run away and hide, maybe in this very place. How much would that have hurt, knowing that his friends were about to leave him?

Jesus knew what was coming. So he went to his favorite place to pray, with his best friends. He went to the Garden of Gethsemane, up the other side of the valley, where he would have had a dark view of the city. He went here to talk with God. (Next video.)

The trees here are very old. Scholars believe some of them growing today were alive when Jesus came here with his disciples. The last tree in the video is the oldest, and tradition says that it was here that John, James, and Peter fell asleep, while Jesus prayed.

I note that Jesus separated the disciples into small groups to pray. That should tell us something about our prayer life. We need to pray with each other, not just alone. Jesus needed his friends in this dark hour, even though they were falling asleep on him (which isn't surprising: they had eaten a huge meal, walked two miles, and now it was after midnight.)

Next to the garden is this church, built a few centuries later. You see it in the video here. It is called the Church of All Nations, built on the site, tradition

says, that Jesus actually prayed here. Since at least 300 AD, pilgrims have come to pray in this spot, on these very rocks which could have been where Jesus threw himself to the ground to pray.

I want you to hear the words again that we read earlier from Mark 14:36. This was Jesus' prayer. "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

What was Jesus praying for in that moment? What was the cup? Scholars have different ideas, but the main thing here seems to be that Jesus was afraid of the suffering he would endure next. Does that seem strange? The cup, I believe, represented the pain and agony he was about to experience in the next 15 hours. Even though Jesus was fully divine, he was also fully human. I didn't want any of the things to happen to me on those nights when I felt agony and couldn't sleep. Is it too much to imagine that Jesus also did not want to experience pain and death? No more than any one of us would. Jesus wasn't sadistic or masochistic.

But the end of his prayer is the most important part. "Not my will, but thy will be done." See, Jesus saw beyond the pain and grief to the end result. We know this from the Gospel of John, who recorded more words and prayers from Jesus' last night than any other gospel. Do you know who Jesus had in mind when he prayed? Us. You and me. He said, "Protect them from the evil one." (John 17:15) "Sanctify them by the truth." (John 17:16) "Send them into the world." (17:18)

He wasn't just talking about the twelve disciples. Jesus said, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one." (John 17:20-21). Jesus prayed for us. Jesus knew if he stayed the course, if he followed God's will and was obedient to

death on the cross, his glory would be revealed to the world, because he would finish the job he was given. (John 17:4) He would save us.

Walk through this with me one more time. Judas betrayed him. His disciples fell asleep when he needed them most. It was dark, he was about to be arrested, beaten, and crucified, and he prayed for us to be saved. Someone asked me a few weeks ago, when Jesus was being taunted to “rescue himself” from the cross, why didn’t he? He certainly could have. Matthew 26:53 says Jesus could have called armies of angels right there in the garden and stopped the whole thing. But if he had, he would have disobeyed God. God would not have glorified the Son, and none of us would be saved.

Think about what we pray for. Think about the times when we need to make a sacrifice. Adam Hamilton said, “Each one of us knows what it is like to sense that God wants us to do something we do not want to do.” Whether it is to serve, start a new ministry, or end an unhealthy relationship, we struggle with obedience. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Case in point: Lent is traditionally a time for fasting. I don’t like fasting!

But that’s why we need Lent. That’s why we need this story of the garden. That’s why we need Jesus’ example. This is all about wrestling with our will, with our pride. Jesus could have complained. He could have whined. He could have argued, “God, this really isn’t a good plan.” He could have blamed Judas, or Peter, or anyone else. But he didn’t.

So where does that leave us? When times are dark, and we pray, do we wrestle with God’s will? Jesus was praying for us in the garden, despite everything else he had to do. You know, the Psalms they sang as part of the Passover meal included Psalm 118. I put a verse in the bulletin for us to

memorize. “Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.” Psalm 118:5 (NRSV) Jesus had those words on his lips, in his mind, as he approached his very own death. That is why he was obedient. He trusted in God. That same power is available to us all. It comes from a loving relationship with Jesus Christ. It comes by trusting in him alone for salvation.

How different would this world be if we submitted to God’s will the way Jesus did? I’m not saying we should literally die on a cross. Jesus was the only one who could do that for us. But we should make sacrifices. We should wrestle with God’s will and accept it in our lives.

Jesus did not want to die. No more than any of us do. But God’s will reigned supreme in his life, overshadowing any fear he felt. That’s worshipping God, and that’s putting others first. What if we lived with the expectation that we should sacrifice our desires, our need for instant gratification, our comfort, lavishness, and luxuries, so that others can be loved? The world would be completely different.

Not my will, but thy will be done. Those are tough words. Those are challenging words to live out. But there is great news. We can do it. Remember those disciples that fell asleep under the olive tree, and then ran away? Later they found the strength to do God’s will, because they met the resurrected Jesus. They received power through the Holy Spirit, and they learned that their prayers were effective when they prayed in God’s will. We can, too.

Regardless of what choice you make, the world is already a different place because of what Jesus did. I hope that we will realize the depth of prayer Christ experienced in the garden, and that we will follow his example.

Memory verse

“Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.” Psalm 118:5 (NRSV)

Reflection questions

1. Where is your favorite place to pray? In your bedroom, outdoors, etc.?
2. Have you ever been desperate to pray? What was happening? What did you want God to do?
3. How often do you find yourself praying “My will be done” prayers, instead of “Thy (God’s) will be done”?
4. Jesus needed Peter, James and John with him in the garden. Why do we need others to support our prayers in times of need?