

“JESUS’ GARDEN PRAYER.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Mark 14:32-42

Prayer: Holy Father, open the eyes of our hearts now and enable us to see from your true and eternal Word what glorifies you, exalts Jesus, and benefits us. And may our wills be conformed to yours in all things.

Introduction.

Human history began in a garden. Human history was completely rewritten in a garden.

Adam ate of the fruit in the garden and plunged us all into sin and death. Jesus agreed to drink of the cup in the garden and raise us all to holiness and life.

The first Adam ignored the will of God and results were disastrous. The second Adam sought the will of God and the results were hard but very good.

In the first garden sin and Satan won and the curse was begun. In the second garden sin and Satan lost and the curse was about to be broken.

Adam was put to the test in the garden and failed miserably. Jesus was put to the supreme test of His life and triumphed.

We come to one of the most powerfully moving and emotionally charged scenes in the life of Jesus, certainly one of the most human scenes.

Mark 14:32-36

Gethsemane.

Gethsemane means olive press which is certainly appropriate. The Garden of Gethsemane is on the lower slope of the Mount of Olives just to the east of Jerusalem and the Temple area.

Jesus left eight of the disciples, telling them “Sit here while I pray,” and took His three closest farther into the olive grove and told them, “Remain here and watch.”

My soul is sorrowful.

Jesus began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.”

The language here is strong. These words are not common words. They express the deepest emotions and feelings. They carry a sense of great alarm and distress, of being overwhelmed with sorrow and burdened with grief, despairing even unto death.

Why is Jesus so tormented? We know people who have faced death with greater composure and courage than this? Certainly the two deaths we have experienced as a congregation the past two weeks were more peaceful, without fear or dread.

There must be something more going on here. Jesus was facing something much more than His own death.

Jesus was God, so He knew everything about what He was going to experience. Jesus was human so what He was going to experience caused intense anguish and sorrow. To be executed by the most painful and torturous means devised and at the hands of wicked men would cause our human bodies and psyche unimaginable agony and stress.

Jesus felt everything a human being would feel in this situation. He felt the consuming stress of all that was about to happen, not just the intense mental, emotional and physical suffering but the spiritual suffering as well.

This wasn't just fear of physical pain. This was a deep awareness of the unutterable and unimaginable weight of our sins and iniquity. He would soon be made a curse, He would be made sin who had never known sin. His holy nature was about to be shamed. He would be wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, smitten by God and afflicted, as a lamb led to slaughter, and cut off from the living (see Isaiah 53).

It's bad enough to have to stand before God and answer for our own sins, but to have to answer before a Holy God for all the sins and malice and wickedness of the whole world, to suffer complete alienation from the Father, to be the object of the Father's eternal wrath, who could bear it?

He wrestled in praying facing the worst demons tempting Him with the greatest temptations. This was the worst kind of nightmare, a living hell.

Never was Jesus more clearly a man as in this garden, His sweat, His tears, His prayers. As a man this was the hour of His greatest weakness, when He showed Himself to be most like us.

Abba, Father.

Jesus was the first one ever to speak to the Father as Abba. There is something unique happening here, but it's not that He is calling God daddy. I know you have heard that, but that's not what Abba means. The word is translated for us, Abba means Father. The Greek language has a word for daddy, pappas.

Abba is intimate and affectionate but also respectful maintaining a deep dignity. It is not casual. The closest for us might be “Dear Father” or “My dearest Father.” It’s a term of warmth and deepest reverence, love and respect.

Only a son or a daughter would use this word. Jesus in all His anguish knew this clearly, He was the Father’s Son.

Remove this cup.

Three times Jesus pleaded with His Father. “All things are possible with you, Father. You can do anything. You can come up with another way, with another plan. Please, take this cup away, this cup of providence.”

Maybe He was thinking of Abraham’s arm raised with the knife ready to plunge into his own son, and how God called out that He had another plan, a substitute, a ram in the thicket. Maybe this was just a test and God would change the plan at the last moment.

Nevertheless, not as I will but as you will.

If this bothers you that Jesus had a will different from the Father’s will, the short answer is that Jesus had two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. It’s in His human nature that He naturally shrank back for such a horrible possibility, just as any of us would.

But Jesus’ desire to obey and submit was stronger than His desire to serve Himself and avoid suffering.

Let’s pause here for a moment and ponder this prayer.

Jesus knows the Father. Jesus knows that the Father is the sovereign God of the universe who can do absolutely anything. So when Jesus asked the Father to come up with another plan for the salvation of the world, and prayed in such a way that sweat profusely poured from every pore of His body dropping to the ground like blood, why did the Father answer no? How could a loving Father turn down such a sincere and earnest request from His perfect Son?

Three times He pleaded. On His face He pleaded for at least an hour. What more could one do? How could the Father say no after that? And yet that’s the answer the Father gives. No. Why did Jesus have to drink this cup?

There are at least five reasons the Father said no.

(see <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabitianyabwile/2012/03/11/six-reasons-the-father-silently-said-no-to-the-son-in-gethsemane/>)

1. The Father answers “No” because we need a High Priest who can identify with us.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

2. *The Father answers “No” because Jesus is the only possible mediator between God and man.*

1 Timothy 2:5 There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

3. *The Father answers “No” because there is no other atonement for our sin.*

1 John 4:10 This is love: Not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

4. *The Father answers “No” because there was no other way to vindicate His own righteousness.*

Romans 3:25-26 God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. ... He did this to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

5. *The Father answers “No” because there was no better way to reveal the mutual glory of the Father and the Son.*

John 17:1, 4-5 Father, the time has come. Glorify your son, that your son may glorify you. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

The Father answered no because the plan He had was the perfect plan. And because the Father answered no to His Son, we now have a perfect High Priest in heaven who has appeased the Father’s wrath for our sin, who has satisfied the Father justice by making atonement for our sin, who has reconciled us to the Father, who has revealed the Father’s glory and made it possible for us to share in His glory forever.

This is the best no answer to a prayer ever given, and we should all be glad He said no. our life and salvation depended on that no answer.

Here in the garden the battle was decided. In prayer Jesus settled on the Father’s will and resolved that the only way forward was to drink this cup of sorrow, suffering and death. Jesus

passed through this temptation, submitted to the Father's will and stood up resolved to face all that was ahead. His prayer was answered.

Application and conclusion: Lessons from Gethsemane.

We should always be so thankful for passages of Scripture like this one that have so much to teach us and open our eyes to so much life-giving truth.

The sinfulness of sin.

From what Jesus experienced we must take away a deep awareness of the exceedingly great sinfulness of sin. If Gethsemane is to bear fruit we must let it speak to us of the offensiveness of all our sin against our Holy Father.

Our sin caused the most intense and agonizing suffering ever endured by any human being ever. We need to feel something of the intense misery of our sins, even our petty sins, and comprehend afresh the intense misery we are spared by being saved from hell's eternal fury and fire.

Don't let your sin become light or casual or no big deal to you. Don't ever let your conscience become seared or hard or unresponsive. If you have to confess the same sin a thousand times, never stop confessing. Keep your heart soft and tender toward the Lord and quick to repent. I plead with you, as a serial, repeat offender, count it a mercy that after a thousand sins you still hate your sin.

Psalm 38:4 For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

Psalm 32:5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Isaiah 1:18 though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

The best of saints are still weak sinners.

What can we learn from the disciples? They knew Jesus personally and had been privileged to be with Him constantly. They just came from the sacrament of the Lord's Table. They have been admonished by our Lord Himself to stay awake, to watch and pray. And yet in spite of all of this, they slept.

We are all slothful when it comes to spiritual things, it really is true that the spirit is willing but our flesh is weak.

All Christians have a double nature, flesh and spirit, and they are at war with each other. We must watch and pray, and ask for the Spirit's help to subdue the flesh and kill fleshly desires.

None of us are so strong that in the face of all temptation we will not stumble and fall. And if we are dull and inattentive to prayer, the day may come quickly upon us when we are ill prepared and ill equipped for the crisis at hand.

The wise man is the man who knows his weaknesses, his flaws and faults, the places where Satan can most easily get a foothold, where the betrayer can get in. The wise man knows this and watches and prays.

Watch and pray for the enemy searches for an opportunity.

The importance of prayer.

Some people feel a little guilty or ashamed when the only time they really pray is when they are in trouble. Welcome to human nature.

The only time we go to the doctor is when we are sick.
The only time we ask for a loan is when we need money.

Psalm 50:15 Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

In the hour of His greatest distress on earth Jesus was on His knees in prayer. In every need, in every affliction, in every addiction, in every crisis, make the first person you talk to God. Turn your first complaints into prayers. Make sure your first text message is a prayer.

James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.

Unburden your souls to the Father. Pour out your hearts at the throne of grace.

And don't fear asking things that are impossible. The Father understands and there is no rebuke.

And don't worry if your prayers bounce from one extreme to another. It's in prayer we sort things out. Remember the trajectory of many of the Psalms is all over the place before settling into the will of God.

Without prayer you will have no power, no victory, no progress, no resisting of temptation. Watch and pray.

Wanting the will of God.

How do you feel when someone says no to you? To something you really wanted?
How did you feel when your father said no to you? To something you really wanted?
How do you feel when your Heavenly Father says no, or wait to something you really want?

This is a very hard lesson from this Gethsemane text.

What you ask may not be given immediately. The relief you want may not be granted all at once, it might come in small steps. The thorn may not be removed. The answer may be no, or later, or I have something else in store.

Follow Jesus' example in prayer. Tell God your heartfelt desires, spread it all out before Him, but then do what Jesus did and submit your will to God's will. And do so in the sure and certain confidence that what He wills will be the very best you could ask for.

It's a sure sign of Christian faith and maturity when you can face a bitter cup and say, "Not my will but your will be done."

Can we learn to say in all things, *if it pleases the Lord, it pleases me?*

Brothers and sisters, here's the truth of the matter. Nothing brings us more misery and grief in this life than having our own way. Our selfish nature is the real thorn in our flesh. We must die to this, and pray daily, "Not my will but Thy will be done."

When can earnestly pray that and earnestly desire that every day, then we are growing in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18).

May God give us ears to hear, minds to understand, and wills to obey.

Prayer:

Colossians 1:9-12 we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.