

“A Garden That Grows Lessons”

Mark 14: 32-42

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Communion Devotion

This morning our attention is drawn to a time when Jesus' humanity was on display. In our text, we see a side of Jesus found in no other passage. Let me give you the details of what occurred that Thursday night in a prayer garden outside of Jerusalem.

Jesus and his disciples had been in the Upper Room eating the Passover meal. This year's meal was unlike any other. Tension was already in the air after Jesus turned over the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple on Monday and then spent the next three days confronting some of the religious authorities about their insincerity and hypocrisy.

Upon leaving the Upper Room after the meal was completed, Jesus led the disciples outside the city gates to a nearby grove of olive trees commonly referred to as the Garden of Gethsemane. Our text clearly states Jesus went to this secluded place to pray, and I certainly understand why. His heart was heavier than it had ever been.

That night he would be arrested and tortured. The next day he would be humiliated, tortured more and crucified.

No wonder he instructed the disciples to pray with him and for him. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” Jesus told the disciples upon entering the garden. Every part of his body ached under the weight of the abuse that would be hurled at him. What was he thinking at a time like this?

Mark pulls back the curtain so we can see and hear. This is why I said earlier Jesus' humanity is on display in this passage.

From Mark's perspective, which probably came from a conversation he had with Simon Peter, Jesus was agitated, anxious, appalled and frightened. In today's terminology, Jesus was in shock.

The event he had talked to his disciples about and had dreaded for some time was fast approaching. There was no turning back now.

His bold indictment of the religious leaders over their addictions to power, prestige, attention, control and money sent them into a rage. They were determined to silence his voice and there was only one way to do it. He had to be arrested and crucified like a common criminal, and they were ready to do it.

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," Jesus told the disciples.

Scholars agree that attempts to describe Jesus' emotions that night are impossible. We cannot fully fathom "my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." It is an immeasurable level of restlessness, anxiety, pain and shock.

Contrast what Jesus was going through with the response of the disciples. Jesus pleaded with them to pray with him before going to a private place in the garden to be alone. Each time he returned to check on them, though, they were asleep. Obviously, they did not grasp his level of anxiety, and his need for their support.

Their time in the garden ended abruptly when Judas led a contingent of religious authorities and Roman soldiers into the garden. They quickly arrested Jesus and whisked him away.

How does this part of the Passion narrative speak to us this morning as we gather around this sacred table? I pondered this question last week and want to share some thoughts with you.

When facing a tough situation, seek human and divine companionship. Jesus did.

He spent the evening with his disciples expressing his love for them and seeking their support. He chose to take them to the garden to pray for God's guidance and strength.

If Jesus could not go it alone, we cannot either. Every one needs human and divine support when facing life's stiffest challenges. Don't go through 'the dark night of your soul' alone.

Be honest with others when you talk to them and candid with God when you pray.

Hold nothing back from those you need the most.

Share your hopes and dreams. Unburden your heart. Talk about your anxieties, worries, fears and doubts.

This is not a time to deny your stress or distress. It is a time to pull back the curtain and put your full humanity on display with your most intimate support group, including God.

That night, Jesus begged God to take this cup of suffering away. He reminded God He could do it. Finally, Jesus concluded his prayer trusting God to do what was best under the circumstances.

"Abba, Father, everything is possible for you," Jesus said. "Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36)

Honesty and desperation gave way to trust in the God Jesus knew as Abba, a loving and responsible Father. I'm not surprised. This Jesus who was sent to do God's will never sought an easy life but a faithful one.

Don't be too hard on those who fail to understand your plight or fright. No doubt Jesus was disappointed in his disciples as they slept that frightful night, but he still loved them.

How could they really know what was coming? It was inconceivable to the disciples that the best man they had ever known would be treated like a criminal. Jesus knew this and understood why they could not stay awake that late at night.

No doubt Jesus was disappointed in God's lack of intervention, but he still trusted God. The God he knew as Abba, a loving and responsible Father, had good reasons for withholding his vengeance. So, Jesus let God be God and relied upon God for the strength and courage he would need to go through this horrible ordeal with dignity and grace.

No one around you fully understands what you are going through at any given time. Don't be too hard on them when they don't respond as you hoped they would. Love them anyway.

Likewise, when God doesn't answer your prayers the way you expected, realize more is at stake than your wellbeing. What God doesn't lift off your shoulders, God helps you carry.

At the same time, listen carefully to others' pleas for help. Do your best to be there when they need you.

Go to the Garden of Gethsemane with them and support them with your prayers and words of encouragement. Let them know you may not be able to take away their pain or problem, but you will walk with them each step of the way.

As we gather around this table today, reflect on these ideas. While the tray and cup are passed, talk to God about what you are going through and seek His support. Ask God to help you offer the kind of support your family members and friends need from you.

I am confident God will help you do both.