

“A Faith Greater than our Fears”

Mark 14:32-42

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

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Communion Devotion

This morning our attention is drawn to the final moments in Jesus' life before he was arrested and crucified. It is Thursday night during Passover and the scene is the Garden of Gethsemane. This beautiful garden adorned with olive trees was just outside Jerusalem's Golden Gate and across the Kidron Valley.

This was the place Jesus and the disciples went immediately after observing the Passover meal in the Upper Room. Evidently, the owner of this private garden was Jesus' friend and had given him permission to go there to meditate and pray.

Jesus needed a quiet and secluded place to pray because he sensed his life was in danger, and he was right. Some of the most influential religious authorities wanted to silence his prophetic voice, and the only way to do this was to have him arrested and crucified.

They were upset with him for exposing their hypocrisy and insincerity. Throughout the week, Jesus condemned them for their addiction to power, prestige, attention, money and lavish lifestyles. He criticized them for using their power and influence for personal gain. He denounced them for making life harder for those who were struggling to survive instead of helping them to rise above their dire circumstances. He called them out for being deceptive and untrustworthy, selfish and greedy, rude and arrogant, insensitive and cruel.

It was not just what Jesus said that threatened some of the most powerful leaders but also what he did. He loved the people they did not. He accepted people they excluded. He

talked to people they ignored. He healed people they would not touch. He taught people they deemed unworthy of learning. He forgave people they held grudges against. He criticized people they coddled. He gave all he had to help the poor instead of taking all they had to make his life easier.

There is no doubt Jesus' words and work created conflict between him and those leaders who chose to control people rather than serve them. I think you understand why they turned on Jesus, along with Herod who was as guilty of these indiscretions as the religious authorities. Jesus threatened them and the power structure that worked to their benefit.

For this reason, there was no place for Jesus and his prophetic voice in their religious structure. When he refused to cooperate with the authorities or tone down his criticism of them, this left them no choice. They had to discredit him and have him crucified.

Now you understood why Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. His heart was broken and burdened. He needed to talk to his Father.

Upon entering the garden, Jesus instructed his disciples to find a place to sit and pray. He took Peter, James and John and went further into the garden to pray.

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," Jesus said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." (Mark 14:34)

After going a little farther, Jesus fell to the ground and began praying. "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet, not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36)

Three times Jesus returned to check on his disciples, and all three times they were asleep. Even Jesus seemed to be surprised that the same disciples who pledged their undying loyalty just moments before chose to sleep instead of pray with him.

Hearing the sounds of soldiers coming into the garden, Jesus awakened the disciples to prepare them for the arrival of his enemies. Little did they know their worst nightmares were about to come true.

You know what intrigues me most about Jesus' garden experience? It is the way his anxiety and courage are both prominently displayed. The humanity of Jesus takes center stage in the Garden of Gethsemane.

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Jesus is not a Super Hero in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is a person of faith who struggles with broken dreams, disappointments, anxieties and fears. He tries to figure out a way to change the ending of his life and ministry, and when he cannot he pleads with God to take this cup of suffering from him.

I must tell you I take comfort in knowing Jesus struggled with the way these events were unfolding. I can relate to the Jesus on his knees pleading with God to intervene. Haven't we all been there, felt that and done that?

At the same time, I find hope in the Jesus who did not give in or give up. He doesn't hide from the authorities or abandon the disciples. He doesn't let his enemies' worst behavior give him permission to be ugly. Instead, he met their treachery with dignity, grace and courage, not just that night but the next day, too.

Where did Jesus find this kind of courage? It was a product of his faith, a faith that emerged from his close relationship with God. Jesus knew if God did not take this cup of suffering away from him, God would provide the strength he needed to endure it.

I cannot tell you how often Jesus' experience in the Garden of Gethsemane has helped me through a difficult period in my life. It reminds me that my faith is equal to any challenge I face. If God could help Jesus during the darkest hours of his life, God can and will help me.

What are you struggling with this morning? What intimidating challenge are you facing? What broken dreams have you carried into this sanctuary?

This is a safe place to bring your challenges, struggles and broken dreams. The One who meets you at this sacred table of remembrance understands anxiety, fear, despair and disappointment. He is fully aware that plans don't always turn out the way we thought they would. He will listen to your prayer and walk with you on your journey toward hope and healing.

Be honest and transparent. Share your inner most thoughts and feelings. Make your requests known to God and then let Jesus help you utter those powerful words of faith and trust, "Yet, not what I will, but what you will."