

January 26, 2020 When Jesus Prayed Pt. 1 Mark 14:32-42

For the next 5 weeks we are going to be taking a look at Jesus praying. This is in one sense a series about prayer. But it really represents an attempt to mine the experience of Jesus in prayer. For a change I am not going to look so much at Jesus teaching about prayer, as examining (and I prefer the word mining) what was happening when Jesus prayed. I am studying what Jesus did when HE prayed. Prayer is a discipline. After 50 years of ministering to people and churches, one would think this is something I would say I really understand. I am still learning. I am asking you to journey with me as I try to learn from the experience of our Lord, who is our Saviour, and is our real Master in this matter of faith.

The passage I read to you is usually one that appears on the worship docket as we approach Easter. Jesus praying in Gethsemane. We talk a lot about how he suffered in prayer in Gethsemane. There are valuable lessons and insights to be gained from examining Jesus experience in that place. What is happening when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane?

I believe the place to start is in taking note of the place. We call it the Garden of Gethsemane. In fact it was, and to some extent still is, an orchard. Any photograph in modern times reveals that Gethsemane is a grove of olive trees. Some of them are at least a thousand years old. You might expect them to be towering trees. They are not. The trunks are massive. There are trees in Gethsemane that we would have to

join hands with someone else if we were going to try and encircle the tree with our arms. And yet they are not tall trees. They do not have great limbs like old Maples. They have been trimmed and pruned and are a mass of buggy whips...fresh growth that provide a place for the blossoms and the fruit.

Jesus led the way. After the last supper, and the celebration of what we have come to know as the sacrament of holy communion, Jesus and the 12 disciples (they) went to the place called Gethsemane. Gethsemane means "oil press." This is the place where the harvested olives were pressed in order that they might harvest the oil. The flesh of the olives was pressed three times. The first pressing yielded the best oil for cooking and a food source. The second pressing yielded oil of a lesser quality, often kept by the owner of the crop for his own table. The third pressing yielded a sour oil that was used as fuel, and it was a valuable fuel, as valuable to the ancient world as petroleum oil is to ours. It was burned in lamps to yield light. It was a fuel for warmth. But to get the oil, the olives must be crushed. Jesus was fully aware that the moment is close when HE will be crushed in order that many might be saved. HE has come to the oil press, Gethsemane in order to pray.

And the fact is, it is here at Gethsemane when Jesus prays we see the fullness of HIS humanity. This olive grove is a lovely place; that is obvious even today. Even though crowds of pilgrims come to this "garden spot," it is a quiet place. When Jesus prays HE often seeks out a quiet place. After all, Jesus

came to the oil press to commune with HIS Father who is our Father. And yet that said, HE has taken 11 friends with HIM. HIS humanity craves company. It may seem strange therefore that Jesus assigned 8 of them to a spot, where HE immediately put some distance between HIMSELF and them. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John a significant distance further away. And then HE repeats this process. He locates Peter and James and John, and then HE goes away from them to pray, and HE is distressed and troubled. Jesus craves their company, and yet, HE separates HIMSELF from the 8 and then from the 3. “Stay here,” HE says. “I am overwhelmed with sorrow. Keep watch.”

We tend to get the point that Jesus finds it helpful to be in a quiet, even an isolated place when he prays. And at the oil press, HE is literally being pressed by conflicting thoughts and feelings. And yet the man Jesus knows, this is a time when HE needs HIS heavenly Father. The man shares what HE is feeling with HIS closest friends. At the same time the Son of God knows HE needs what only the communion with HIS Father will, and does provide in the midst of the oil press.

There is no question of who is in charge. “Stay here. Keep watch.” Those are orders. Jesus is in charge and there is a degree to which the disciples understand. They are obedient in the matter of staying, giving him a measure of distance, a measure of privacy, but their eyes are heavy. Watching is a boring activity. Especially when coupled with

staying in one place. Their attention drops away. They drop off. It has been a long day. They sleep.

Jesus has been praying..."take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." It is here in the oil press, Jesus submits and refuses to turn back.

We discover that as focused as Jesus is on the mission of the cross, as focused as HE is on prayer, HE does not forget the 3, nor the 8. He returns to them and finds them asleep. Jesus wakes them up. He scolds them for their lack of focus on their assignment. "Watch and pray." HE instructs. Temptation is a power to be aware of, HE shares. HE reminds that the spirit is willing...Jesus has no doubt about that concerning Peter, concerning us, but the flesh is weak. Two insights. Jesus understands we have made a commitment to follow HIM. We have invested our souls. The spirit, our spirits are willing. But our flesh...well that's another matter. Weakness is real. Our bodies are not functional on the same level as our spirits are. Boredom comes easy. Sleep and inattention to the command "watch and pray" come easier still. And temptation is always a problem for us. Because the Tempter has another agenda than that of our heavenly Father. And he always flavours the poison with sugar.

Jesus returns to HIS spot and HIS prayers. He returns and finds them asleep a second time. He wakes them. They do not know what to say. I have been there and done that. Knowing that excuses are excuses. I have been silent

before my Lord. Knowing that justification...there were reasons...I did not obey...good reasons...those too are excuses. What do you say when you fall short of Jesus expectations? We hide in silence and nurse our guilt. Sometimes it is just easier to ask for forgiveness, later. Watch and pray!

Jesus tells them and therefore HE tells us to pray with our eyes open. To see what is happening in the real world even as we seek HIS presence for strength, comfort, focus on the mission before us. There is a lesson here about not getting so into the religion we fail to be faithful. Watch. Observe. Process the information. The intel that comes of watching, and still spending time in prayer.

The routine gets repeated a third time. Jesus finds them asleep. He wakes them up. He observes the time for prayer is gone. "Enough." The betrayer is at hand. Quiet time is over. The time for reflection is past. And while the lesson has been learned, it takes time and water under the bridge to realize what the lesson was, let alone its significance.

We learn important things when we watch what is happening, when Jesus is praying. Let us seek HIS help.

Lord, God, Holy Spirit;

Help us to learn that everything YOU did and do is for a reason, and we can benefit from looking at the details at least one more time. Help us to take advantage of quiet places, that make it easier to find the words of prayer.

Help us to seek your presence. Empower our willing souls to do YOUR will. Help us to understand the reality of the tempter's design. Grant us moments when we overcome the weakness of our bodies and our minds, flesh and blood, sinew and bone. Lead us, and be with us even when we cannot see that you are leading and accompanying, strengthening and building us. Grant that we might serve you and those whom you permit us to touch. Amen