

The Battle in Gethsemane

Maundy Thursday, April 17, 2014

Luke 22:39-53

Jesus has had a rough week.

On Sunday He rode into the city, among a people who while singing praises with their lips, had their hearts far from him.

He sees Jerusalem and sobs – knowing not only their betrayal of him, but also of their ultimate destruction and devastation in years to come.

On Monday he goes to the Temple a place of prayer and meeting with God and using a handmade whip – he drives people from it. People who are using religion as an excuse, creating barriers to God rather than building bridges.

These people who have been chosen by God have turned their backs on him and have turned his House into a market place of thieves.

Jesus spends Tuesday teaching people, as much as he can, the secrets of the kingdom of God – and throughout he is badgered by religious leaders trying to catch him out, trying to talk him into a corner.

He has so little time left and yet he needs to debate taxes and authority and law.

On Wednesday one of the Twelve, one of his beloved disciples and closest friends goes behind his back to the authorities and agrees to betray him.

Not for reasons of principle mind you or because Jesus had done something wrong – but for money. Judas sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of metal.

Today, Thursday, Jesus has had that final supper with his disciples. He's saying his final goodbyes, his final teaching, his final time among the company of people who love him – and they don't even get it.

They can't understand what he's saying. He tells them of the betrayal coming and they can't fathom it let alone believe it. Jesus is saying goodbye, and they are falling asleep...

Gethsemane is the place of the final battle. Jesus comes before the Father and pleads, begs, and wrestles. "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me!!"

And God says No.

Do you realize how hard that is? Every prayer that Jesus has prayed up until now has been answered with a yes.

People have been healed, fed and raised from the dead. Storms have been calmed, disciples chosen and hearts transformed.

And now Jesus comes to the point where what he wants, and what needs to happen are two different things.

In the taunting at the cross "Are you not the Christ – Save yourself and us!" lies the agony of this night – that was the one thing that was impossible. He could not save others and Himself.

This hour didn't pass Him by and neither will the hour of testing pass us by as we live out our lives here on earth. Sooner or later each of us will find ourselves in our own personal Gethsemane.

We too will have questions and prayers and petitions. These are the hours in hospital waiting rooms, in court rooms, or after dreaded phone calls.

They are in the loneliness of pain or isolation, in facing injustice, in the darkness of grief or in the betrayal by those closest to us.

They are the long nights, the paced floors and the tears cried until they run dry.

Where what we want, what we love, and what happens to be are two different things.

A little child who had just learned the alphabet kept repeating time after time the letters of the alphabet in an attitude of prayer. A missionary approached her and asked what she was saying.

The little girl's answer was, "I am praying." "But why do you repeat the alphabet?" "I felt that I should pray, and because I did not know how to pray, I repeated the letters of the alphabet, knowing that the great Lord would fit the letters together to make words out of them"

Sometimes in our dark times we run out of words. They are the times the Bible talks of in Romans – where the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Jesus has been there... when God says no.

A question then would be –why did Jesus pray? Why did he ask when... unlike us – he knew that the answer would be no. He knew there was no other way. Yet he prays.

His prayer is about being with the Father. In his moment of grief and terror. His moment of loneliness and despair to the point of death. Jesus seeks out the Father and pours out his soul to Him.

And Luke's Gospel tells us that he is strengthened.

“Sometimes God stills the storms of the sea
At other times, He stills the storms within me.”

If we had witnessed Jesus’ struggle that night, we might have said, "If He is so broken up when all He is doing is praying, what will He do when He faces real crisis?

Why can’t He approach this ordeal with the calmness and confidence of His three sleeping friends?"

And yet when the time for the test finally came, Jesus walked to the cross with the courage, and His three friends fell apart and ran away.”

What made the difference?
It was that time of prayer.

Prayer that gave Jesus His strength
Prayer that gave Jesus His courage.
Prayer that gave Jesus His power to face the pain, the humiliation and the horrors of the cross.

The Father did not take away the cup, but sent what was needed for Jesus to drink of it. Jesus was not alone in the Garden for his Father was with him.

God may not take away your cup but He will provide everything you need to drink of it.

The story of Gethsemane is that Jesus is with you in your pain, in your loneliness, in your darkness, in your doubt. When you shake your fist at God or weep in despair – Jesus has been there. You are not alone.

We see from the agony of prayer, Jesus returns with courage – and to the crowd who come to arrest him – he calmly tells them – I am the one you are looking for... let these other men go.

He does not call down the Legions of Angels. He does not plead. He does not tremble. He goes with them and in silence accepts their false accusations, their spit, their thorns, their taunting, their beating...

Max Lucado in his book "And the Angels Were Silent" wrote:
"The battle is won. You may have thought it was won on Golgotha. It wasn't. You may have thought the sign of victory is the empty tomb. It isn't. The final battle was won in Gethsemane. And the sign of conquest is Jesus at peace in the olive trees. For it was in the garden that he made his decision... He would rather go through hell for you than go to heaven without you."