

No Garden Paradise

Mark 14:32-42

Preached March 8, 2009 by Dr. Dwight Kilbourne

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Introduction. There is no scene in the gospels that shows more emotional struggle in the life of Jesus than the one just read. In only a few places in the gospels do we find Jesus displaying his emotions: he wept at the tomb of his friend, Lazarus (John 11:35) and he lamented that Jerusalem had not accepted his message (Luke 13:34ff). Here we see an intense emotional struggle that Jesus encountered. The gospel writer was not intending to communicate facts and details but wants the readers to experience emotionally what happened to Jesus.

This story runs counter to what we commonly think regarding our heroes. We assume when our "heroes" march off toward the challenging mission, they do so with courage. They put a determined look in their eyes, clench their jaws and do not look back. With determination and resolve, they face what is ahead.

But here we see a different portrait. We find that our greatest hero, Jesus the Christ, faced an emotional struggle before he completed his mission. We learn that often there are crucial battles fought before climactic encounters take place. Jesus fought that battle in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This morning as we examine this story, I encourage you to take a close look at Jesus. Understand the emotion he encountered as he faced his destiny that would lead to the salvation of humanity. As you look into that window, see the reflection of your own life and struggles. Then focus again on Christ for a model for facing them with a new resolve.

The emotional struggle.

God wired each of us differently when it comes to emotions. Some people are highly emotional, while others seem to express little emotion. In my birth home, this was obvious to me early on. My mother is a person who has always been free with the expression of her emotions, who can shed tears of grief freely or be overwhelmed with joy. My father on the other hand is one who is much less emotionally expressive. When he cries, everyone takes notice.

The gospels paint Jesus as one who seemed to be emotionally conservative. As mentioned before, we rarely see him being overwhelmed with extreme emotions. He seems to be stable and consistent in his emotional expressions. So when we move to this event, we must take notice.

Here in our gospel lesson, Mark uses three words in two verses to describe Jesus' emotional state: (Jesus) *began to be distressed and agitated*. He said to them, *'I am deeply grieved, even to death.'* Even without explanation, we can feel the emotion.

In reading the Passion narrative from the Last Supper onward, one can sense the heightening of the story's emotion. Jesus at the meal points forward to what is ahead through symbol and metaphor. He speaks of one betraying him. He shares that the disciples will flee and

Peter will deny him. Then when we get to this point in the story, the emotion seems to strike Jesus head on – *he began to be distressed and troubled*. (Have you ever had that experience where all seems to be building and then in one moment, the weight of emotion hits you?)

Mark demonstrates the intensity of Jesus' emotion when he records his statement: *"I am deeply grieved, even to death."* That is intense. His emotions felt like they were killing him. In Luke, the evangelist illustrates the intensity of Jesus' emotions by saying his sweat became like drops of blood dropping to the ground (22:44). Jesus was sweating blood. In this story we see Jesus' raw emotions being expressed.

Why was Jesus so distressed? Nearly all of us here know what was to follow this garden event for Jesus. Imagine though, if you were reading this for the first time, wouldn't you ask about why he was distressed?

In his prayers, Jesus mentioned "this cup" – "remove this cup from me." Jesus understood he had a cup from which he was to drink. The cup was a rich metaphor that drew from Jewish scripture and the experience of Jesus and the disciples. In the OT, often there is mention of a "cup" which is a reference to suffering or experiencing God's wrath. *For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed; he will pour a draught from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs* (Psalm 75:8). During the ministry of Jesus, a couple of the disciples come to Jesus asking to occupy a special place in relationship to Jesus in his kingdom. Jesus asks them if they are able to drink from the same cup he will drink (Matthew 20:22). At the Last Supper, he takes the cup and says, "This is blood of the new covenant."

It seems the cup points toward Jesus' own suffering. He understood his mission would involve him being a martyr. Jesus' emotion seems to be centered on the suffering that lay ahead and his death.

History tells us of another faith hero who experienced intense emotions before his

death. Friends of Martin Luther King, Jr. have told that often this great preacher talked of his death. Jesse Jackson, who was a close friend and aid, was with him the day before the assassination. He recalls that King was *"contemplative and somewhat sad and that he sat in his room most of that day reminiscing about his past.*

(www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1726656_1726689_1726268,00.html) Another friend Rev. Samuel Kyles remembered King's mood on that day and he had been talking about his death. That evening King preached at Mason Temple. Kyles said this, *"It was as if he had preached himself through the fear of death...and the next day he was in a lighthearted mood. He was almost giddy."* (www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1726656_1726689_1726462,00.html)

Listen to the last words of his message: *Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land.* (<http://www.afscme.org/about/1549.cfm>).

Praying through the fear of death.

In this garden narrative, Jesus does not preach himself "through the fear of death." But he does call on resources to help him face what is ahead.

As Jesus went into the garden, he had all of the disciples except three to sit at a place where they entered. Then he invited Peter, James and John to come with him. It seems Jesus longed for the presence of his closest friends.

Most of us want and find comfort in having our closest friends around us when we go through tough times. When we get a bad report from the medical test, learn of a loved one's death, bad news about the status of our job, open our 401k report and find it is a 201 or 101k, or know a

climactic encounter is ahead, we want friends nearby. The presence of friends can be of great assistance in getting through tough emotional times.

In this Jesus story, Jesus' friends let him down. While he struggled in prayer, they fell asleep. According to this account, they fell asleep three times. They did care, but they did not understand what was happening. They lacked the resources to provide the level of help needed. As great as friends are and can be, there are times when they lack the resources to provide the level of support we need.

Even though his earthly friends failed him, Jesus had another friend to whom he could turn. He used the greatest resource given to mortals – prayer. Through prayer, he connected with the Father in heaven. Jesus prayed through the fear of his death.

Here lies our greatest resource that can connect us to God, who can carry us through our deepest emotional distress. God can get us through our pain, our fear and our distress.

How Jesus prayed is worth noting. The tone and message of his prayer was one of brutal honesty. It was not one that said, "Well Lord, things are tough. I need your help." Jesus stated what was going on in his mind and heart. He called on God to let this hour pass, for the cup to be taken from him. He was asking the Father if there was not some other way. "Lord, can't you change your plan? Does it have to happen this way? Take away the pain and suffering." (Have you ever voiced those types of words to God?)

Those words alone would not have been sufficient. He went on to express some of his core theology – "Father, all things are possible for you." He knew God could do anything. If God is God, all things are possible. His Father in heaven could change his destiny. (We often find ourselves asking God questions out of a similar understanding, "Lord, why did you let this happen? Why did you not intervene?")

It is obvious from our text, that this struggle took place over time. It was not a

few-seconds conversation. But Jesus came to the place of resolution: "Not my will but your will be done." Deep in Jesus' heart, he knew what the Father's will was. He knew he must die a martyr's death.

Now, Jesus prayed fervently and came to resolution and all was well, right? Not exactly. We find that in Mark's version, Jesus returned to this act of praying three times. Was he vacillating in his resolve? Was he continuing to fight his emotion and the weight of the situation?

Jesus continued to pray until he had complete resolve to move forward. He came to the place of doing so, even though he would go alone. For him, the hour had come. He was able to move forward to do God's will.

Not everyone gets to the place Jesus did. Some give in to their emotions and become entrapped and paralyzed by them. Some give up and refuse to go on. (One who influenced me significantly, my grandfather, came to a place in his life at 93 where he was depressed and took his life.) Some choose to flee by running from their destiny and they drown their emotions in other activities or chemicals. But for those who face them in submitting to God, a resolve is given that carries them through.

Invitation.

This morning, I am sure that there are some who are struggling with deep emotional pain. I urge you to pray as Jesus did.

There are some here who sense God calling you to yield your life completely to Christ, but you are afraid. Today, share those fears and allow God to give you the strength to surrender.

There are some here who have a calling in life to ministry or some great work for God's sake. Yet you are scared to death. Will you pray?

There is no better place to pray than here at the chancel. If you come and want a pastor to pray with, lift a hand and we will join you.