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Message for March 8, 2020
"According to Luke: Struggle"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Luke 22:39-46

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." (Luke 22:39-46)

The Garden of Gethsemane

The afternoon we spent in the Garden of Gethsemane was bright and sunny. The garden is really quite beautiful. It overlooks the Old City of Jerusalem.

The garden features row after row of olive trees, some of which reportedly date back to the time of Jesus.

As I walked along that garden, taking it all in, the brightness of the day seemed to fade away. My focus was more so on the night Jesus knelt and prayed there. It was a dark night indeed.

I was particularly drawn to the older trees. Could it be that this was the place where Jesus knelt the night before his crucifixion?

I felt a certain tie between my struggles and Christ's. I was encouraged that in the midst of *his* struggle he prayed. I am encouraged to do the same in the midst of my own struggles.

Driven to Our Knees

The struggles Jesus faced drove him to his knees. He wanted to pray. He needed to pray. He wanted nothing more than to connect with his Heavenly Father.

Sometimes the only thing we can do is pray. I have been around so many people and so many situations where prayer is the only thing that brings solace, where the only relief is to connect with God through prayer.

Every now and then I will have people to call on me to pray for them. They do so out of a deep need, sometimes a desperate need. I am always willing to oblige. Now, it's not that my prayers are any more special than anybody else's. I do realize though the importance of the connection that takes place when I pray with someone.

Have you ever been driven to your knees? Have circumstances been so foreboding that you can do no other but pray?

James Merritt writes, *"I can tell you that the person who abandons himself or herself to God will never be abandoned by God."*

Follow Christ's Lead

For Jesus the challenges he faced were so intense that *"his sweat became like great drops of blood."* We can only imagine his struggle.

Jesus though was well-aware of the power of prayer. He knew that prayer connected him with God like nothing else.

Prayer was a regular practice for Jesus. He leads by example when it comes to prayer.

We should not be surprised that with all Jesus faced, he made his way to the Mount of Olives to pray. The scripture states that it was his *"custom"* to do that. Prayer was the very life blood of his relationship with God.

You and I are called to follow his example. We need to do as Jesus did.

The Model for All Prayer

In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus offers that great model for all prayer. We call it *The Lord's Prayer*.

"This is how you should pray," he said. Persons of faith have been praying that prayer ever since.

"Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be your name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us of our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Matthew 6:9-13)

I pray that prayer all the time. It forms the flow of my praying night and day. I pray it one time and the focus rests on praise for God. I pray it another time and my focus is on God's will. Yet I pray it another time I will consider his provision. You get the idea.

The Lord's Prayer is not a prayer to be prayed by rote. It leads us to the very places God wants us to be.

Not My Will, But Yours Be Done

In the garden, Jesus provides another great model for prayer. There in the garden Jesus prayed, *"Not my will, but yours be done."*

The prayer Jesus prayed there in the garden was honest in every way. Jesus laid himself before God and God, just like he does with us, met Jesus right where he was.

While Jesus would have much preferred for the “*cup*” he was about to experience to have passed, Jesus was more interested in doing God’s will and his praying prepared him to do just that.

“*Not my will, but yours be done*” rings through the ages. It challenges us in every way. It inspires us as well. To come to that place of seeking the will of God instead of our own is the very place God wants us to be.

It may take us a while to get there, but it’s the place God wants us.

Discerning God’s will is not always easy. Discernment is not as clear cut as it might seem. We’ll never get to the heart of God’s will though unless we stay at our prayers.

Sometimes in our praying we are left to wonder about what God’s up to. Our prayers aren’t always answered as we think they should be. We are left to wonder if God’s really does have our best interests at heart.

In such moments for me, I remember the great passage from Romans 8:28. “*In all things God works for the good for those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*”

From Luke 11:11-13 we read, “*Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?*” Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

Let This Cup Pass

There may be a “*cup*” that you’re asking God to take away from your life. It might be an illness, a situation at work, or some broken relationship.

You have prayed and prayed, but the “*cup*” just doesn’t seem to pass.

As you stay at your prayers though you begin to consider God’s great love and begin to abandon yourself to his care, whatever the outcome.

You too begin to pray, “*Not my will, but yours be done.*”

“*Not my will, but yours be done,*” is a prayer of deep faith that puts us in the warm embrace of our God and in that warm embrace we are able to make it through whatever it is we’re facing.

God’s Will—Our Ultimate Best

God’s will is ultimately for our best. We may not always realize it, but it is.

I don’t use that word, “*ultimately*” very lightly. God’s will always plays out in light of eternity.

What about you? Do you believe that God’s will is ultimately for your best or do you try and manipulate God to work things out the way **you** want them?

Even as Jesus was driven to his knees and he prayed for the “cup” of the cross to pass, he knew in his heart of hearts that God’s ultimate plan for his life was playing out.

Jesus says in John 6:38, *“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”*

That was how Jesus lived to the very end.

Pray Continually

“Pray continually,” says Paul in I Thessalonians 5:17.

- *“Pray continually.”* Make it your “custom,” so that when challenges do come your way you will be better prepared to meet them.
- *“Pray continually,”* so that when struggles abound, prayer will become your first response and because of that you will face them that much better.

Jesus tried to get that sort of thing across to his disciples. He asked them to pray with him so that they might be strengthened for what was to come.

Sure, Jesus would have liked to have had their support during his own time of trial, but his real interest in asking them to pray was to make sure they were well-connected to God.

He knew prayer was the only thing that would accomplish that.

Instead of praying though, the disciples fell asleep. They fell asleep on their prayers. They fell asleep on Jesus. They ultimately fell asleep on God.

Fit for the Struggle

Jesus knew that his disciples needed to pray, just as he knows we need to pray.

“Pray,” he says, *“that you may not come into the time of trial.”*

Some versions put it this way, *“Pray that you will not fall into temptation.”*

Jesus knew that evil was swirling.

Upon emerging victoriously from his own time of temptation, the scripture records that the devil *“left him and waited for an opportune time.”* (Luke 4:13)

It could very well be that the struggle Jesus now faced in the garden was that *“opportune time.”*

Jesus was well-aware that he needed to fit himself for the struggle that lay before him and prayer was the very thing that would help him do that.

The scripture records that there in the garden an angel came to Jesus and strengthened him.

The disciples would need that same strength, but to their detriment they fell asleep and the opportunity passed for that to happen.

We're no different when it comes to such things.

"Put on the full armor of God," says Paul, "so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 5:10-12)

Strengthened for the Road Ahead

Luke talks about Jesus *"getting up"* from his time of prayer.

The inference here is not so much about him getting up as it is him being strengthened because he prayed.

Because of the time Jesus spent with God, he emerged stronger and more resolute.

A lot was settled because he had prayed. He was resolved to do God's will and because of that he was strengthened to no end.

As with Christ, the time we spend praying gets us ready to meet our own struggles.

"What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."