

Mk 14:32-42
In the Garden
Tim Anderson 7/4/2023

Jesus praying in the Garden is one of the Easter stories that I think we resonate with.

From the time we were kids and we vowed that we would stay awake to see Father Christmas and yet we fell asleep only to awake in the morning, we have known that much and all as you might fight against sleep, in the end it will win.

And so we resonate with Jesus' disciples.
Called upon to do something they can't manage.

Others of us have had more serious issues in our lives. We've wrestled with God in prayer about some matter that concerned us deeply. And so we resonate with Jesus coming before the Father. 14:36 "Daddy, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me."
Lord, please.
This is a relatable story.

But I wonder if you've asked yourself why it happened. Why did Jesus come before the Father pleading that he might not have to go to the cross? Why did he take the disciples with him on a mission that they were not able to accomplish? And at the end of the day, what did this little incident achieve? How would it be different if we went straight from the Last Supper to the arrest of Jesus, bypassing the Garden?

So let's sit with Jesus in the garden this Good Friday.

And if you are still awake at the end of the sermon,
then you did better than Peter, James and John.

14:32 "They went to a place called Gethsemane,
and Jesus said to his disciples,
"Sit here while I pray."

He took Peter, James and John along with him,
and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled."

Now praying for Jesus was often done alone.

In Mark 1 we read of Jesus getting up early in the morning,
before the disciples are awake.

And going off by himself to a solitary place to pray.

That was how he usually did it.

This time he brings three of his disciples along with him.

Why would he do that?

Popular Christian piety often presumes
that the disciples were there for support.

Jesus is going into the most awful,
the most terrifying situation,
and at a time like that,

you would like to have friends with you.

I'm not convinced about that.

I would want to have my friends with me.

But Jesus knows his disciples.

He knows that they won't be a support.

And Jesus isn't pictured leaning on his disciples for support
anywhere in the gospels.

Jesus' support comes from the Father.

The Father is who he goes to when his pathway is fraught.

His disciples are there so they can witness and learn.

And they are there so we can be told the story.

If they didn't go with him,

Mark wouldn't have had access to the story.

The same three disciples go with Jesus up the mount of transfiguration.
They are not there
because Jesus needed some help meeting with Moses and Elijah.
They are there so we can be told the story.
And so that they have access to that event later on.
So it can shape their understanding of who Jesus was and why he came.

These were Jesus' closest disciples.
They accompanied him on a number of occasions
without the other nine.
Isn't it interesting that the ones who were closest
were also the ones who publicly failed.
The very verses prior to this reading,
Jesus tells Peter that Peter will deny him three times.
14:31 "But Peter insisted emphatically,
"Even if I have to die with you,
I will never disown you.""
He was undoubtedly sincere.
And yet within an hour he was asleep
when Jesus had told him to keep watch.
Within 24 hours, he had denied Jesus 3 times as Jesus said he would.
And for each time he denied Jesus,
he fell asleep once in this passage.

The best of Jesus' disciples were wholly unreliable.

This is actually a Good Friday sign for us.
How much do you contribute to your salvation?
Jesus does his bit, he dies on the cross for you.
You do your bit, you serve him as best you can.
You love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength.
At least on a good day you do that a bit.
So how much of your salvation is your work
and how much is Jesus' work?
Does Jesus do 90% and you do 10%?

No. Not at all.

Jesus does 100%.

How much did Peter, James and John contribute in the garden?

Nothing.

They couldn't stay awake.

And if you had been there,
you would have been napping too.

We contribute nothing to our salvation.

What about the faith we have in Jesus?

Surely our faith must be some contribution?

Paul tells the Ephesian Christians,

Eph 2:8 "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith,
and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Did you catch that?

Your faith is a gift from God.

It's not a good work that you contribute to your salvation.

It's something that you could not do by yourself,
that God graciously stoops down and gives you.

You could never trust in Jesus by yourself.

Only by the Holy Spirit coming into your heart and changing it
can you trust in Jesus.

Why is it important

that we realise we make zero contribution to our salvation?

Because the human heart is prone to pride.

We all want to think we are better than other people.

Are we better than the people who don't have faith?

No. We aren't better.

We have just been given a gift that they haven't been given yet.

14:34 Jesus said to them,

"Stay here and keep watch."

What are they keeping watch for?

Are they perhaps watching

so they can alert Jesus if the authorities come to arrest him?

No. It's not that.

Jesus is not interested in evading arrest by the authorities.

He will go willingly when the time comes.

What are they watching for?

14:38 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

What are they keeping watch for?

They are keeping watch over themselves.

Even at this hour,

at this most difficult time in his life,

Jesus is training his disciples.

He's training them to do what he is doing.

Jesus is involved in a spiritual battle here.

Jesus was 100% obedient to the Father.

Always.

But that doesn't mean that obedience was 100% easy for him.

Going to the cross was a struggle.

He didn't want to do it.

He prayed,

14:36 "Take this cup from me."

The cup that he was wanting to avoid

was the judgment of God on sin.

The cross for Jesus is not just about the physical pain and humiliation.

It's not even mostly about the physical pain and humiliation.

It's about spiritual separation from his relationship

of perfect love with the Father.

That shouldn't be surprising for us.

Suppose I got cancer and I was dying.

Would I be more distressed about the pain of the cancer

or the thought of leaving my wife and children who I love behind?

You want to believe it would be the second option.

Even though I know that I will see them again in glory,

it would still give me great pain to leave them behind.

Jesus' relationship with the Father

is immeasurably closer and more intimate than any human relationship.

Of course he doesn't want to be forsaken by the Father.

In the garden of Gethsemane,
he is wrestling in prayer to keep himself on track.
He is wrestling in prayer to stay on mission.

And when he says to Peter, James and John,
"Stay here and keep watch,"
that's what he wants them to do too.
Struggle in prayer that they might stay faithful.
What should Peter have been praying?
"Heavenly Father,
Jesus says that I am going to deny him.
Lord, I want to stay faithful to Jesus.
Please help me to stay faithful.
Empower me by your Spirit to stay faithful."
But instead of praying that prayer,
he had a snooze,
and then before he knew it,
he was denying Jesus.

The struggle of the Christian faith is the struggle to stay faithful.
Often we invent all kinds of other things to keep us busy.
Some of those things are reasonable worthwhile.
Others are just making activity for the sake of it.
But unless we stay faithful,
it's all useless.
And staying faithful is a struggle.

It's so easy to be an activist.
To think of all of the work that you need to get done.
I have to write a sermon.
I have to cook for Trinity Tucker.
I have to prepare for Trinity Kids.
I have to arrange the flowers.
I have to mow the church lawns.
There is so much stuff to do.

The struggle to stay faithful is more important than any of those.
Watch and pray.
That's real work.
Prioritise it.

Why is staying faithful a struggle?
Because the devil is real.
He wants to corrupt you.
And he's working with all his might to do that.
That's why we must watch and pray
that we wouldn't fall into temptation.
God is more than ready to answer that prayer.

I think that might be what verse 38 is saying.
14:38 "The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."
In Greek there are no capital and small letters to tell us
whether Spirit refers to our spirit or the Holy Spirit.
It's a decision of the translator how to put it in English.
I think there should probably be a capital S on Spirit in verse 38.
The Holy Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.
In other words,
God is willing to help you not fall into temptation by his Holy Spirit,
but in your human flesh you are weak
and will be unable to avoid temptation.
That's why you need to pray, Peter.
That's why you need to pray, Christian.

I wonder how often we actually do pray
that God would help us avoid temptation.
It's something that Jesus wants us to do.
Do we do it?
Or do we think,
it's not such a big deal if I fall into temptation.
Jesus has died to pay for my sins,
they are forgiven anyway,

I don't need to struggle against temptation.

Let me encourage you,
struggling against temptation is worthwhile.
Yes it is true that Jesus has paid the price for your sins.
But that's not a licence to sin with reckless abandon.
As Paul tells the Romans,
Rom 6:1 "Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?
By no means!"

But there's another encouragement.
Jesus has succeed in the struggle against sin.
The Garden of Gethsemane is something like
an undoing of the Garden of Eden.
What happened in the Garden of Eden?
Temptation was placed in front of the man and woman.
They didn't struggle against it.
They failed.
They gave in to temptation.
And their failure has been passed down the generations to us.
What happened in the Garden of Gethsemane?
Temptation was place in front of Jesus.
Jesus did struggle against it.
He succeeded.
He did not give in to temptation.
And his righteousness is given to us.

Can you see that the Garden of Gethsemane
reverses what happened in the Garden of Eden?
And that is encouraging news for us.
Jesus' victory over temptation becomes our victory over temptation.
If not always in our experience,
it is how God regards us.
You have victory over temptation
because God looks at you with Jesus' righteousness applied.

Jesus perfect submission to the Father is applied to us.

They are beautiful words, aren't they?

14:36 "Yet not what I will but what you will."

That is a model of perfect submission.

Are you prepared to pray that prayer?

We hold on tightly to what we would like to happen.

It's uncomfortable to pray 'not what I will'.

I wouldn't mind betting

that there are things that you want

that you know God doesn't want for you.

You can probably bring them to mind.

You'll never get a better opportunity than this.

Take this opportunity right now to pray,

"Not what I will but what you will."

"Not what I will but what you will."

Or maybe you can't think of anything

where what you want is different from what God wants.

Doesn't mean that it's not there.

It may just mean that you don't recognise

where you want something that is not what God wants.

You can still pray the prayer.

"Not what I will but what you will.

Lord, I don't know where my will is different to yours,

but when you reveal it to me,

we will do things your way."

Let me summarise the message of this passage.

1. Do engage in the struggle against temptation.

Do pray that you wouldn't fall into temptation.

Don't be lazy and think that it doesn't matter.

Don't be an activist

and think that all the hard work you do

is more important than the struggle against temptation.

But 2. Also remember that Jesus has won the battle
and his victory is your victory.

You are going to lose the struggle against temptation sometimes.

That's part of being human.

God can still use you in his service.

He used Peter, James and John.

Do struggle against temptation.

But own Jesus victory.

Don't be crushed when you fail.