

In the Garden: The Submission

Dr. Tom Pace

March 8, 2020

Mark 14:32-42

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. ³⁴ 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." Mark 14:32-42 (NRSV)

Join with me in prayer. Gracious God open us up. Open our eyes that we might see the world through your eyes, just a little bit. Open our ears that we might hear your word in the midst of these words and open our hearts, God, that we might feel, and and then, O Lord, open our hands that we might serve. Amen.

So, Jesus faced this time of trial. Remember, Jesus was fully human, experiencing all the same anguish and challenges that you and I would face. And this particular passage has always been really powerful for me personally and maybe even more so than the cross. Just because it's this wrestling inside that Jesus is doing, this internal anguish he's facing. This incredible desire for his disciples to be with him. All of those things and then a moment in which he makes a decision.

The word "Gethsemane" - this garden of Gethsemane that we will be talking about where these events happened, as we go through this Lenten season, is at the base of the Mount of Olives. We think the name *Gethsemane* is a derivation of a phrase that means "the place of the olive press," here they would bring the olives down the Mount of Olives to this garden, this place where there were olive trees. If you go there today there are 900 year old olive trees and it's just amazing. There they would press the olive oil out of the olives. The symbolism and imagery of just the weight of the mission that Jesus has, the weight of the expectation of God pressing down on him. Squeezing.

The Gospel of Luke's version of this has this additional detail. It says, "And being in anguish he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." The olive press, pressing down on him in this time of trial.

I wonder if you've had a time of trial. I suspect it was not exactly like this, but we go through times in our lives that are really difficult. And how do we deal with those? I thought we might look at this passage and see what we can learn from Jesus about how he dealt with the time of trial. I have six things I want to share so you can take some notes. I want to move quickly through them, and I think they're all important.

I want to begin with these words: "He took with him Peter and James and John." Jesus didn't go alone. It's really kind of an interesting paradox he's dealing with here and it resonates so much with people I know and even when I've had difficult times. The crowds were gone, no more crowds so it's just his disciples. Judas has gone so there are just 11 disciples there. He goes and takes them with him to the Garden of Gethsemane but then he says to eight of them, "I want you to stay here," And he goes on with Peter, James and John. Then he says to Peter, James and John, "You stay here and I'm going to go off by myself." Then he keeps coming back again to Peter, James and John to ask, "Can you stay awake with me?"

It's like he knows he's going to reach out to the people he loves to be with him. But he knows in his heart that he has to go through that anguish by himself.

Isn't that the way it is with us? That we want to have people with us and yet we know that they can comfort us, but we have to go through it by ourselves in some ways.

One of the most significant moments of my whole ministry was in the church I served before I came here. A young woman was struggling with terminal cancer and the doctors finally said to her that there was nothing more than could do for her, that she needed to move to

palliative or hospice care. She had small children; it was a tough time. At one point she looked at me and said, "Pastor Tom, I know you can't go with me across the River Jordan, but will you walk with me all the way to the edge?"

That has just stuck with me for years. That when we go through difficult times, we know we have to do some of it alone, but we want to have people with us. There's no way you're supposed to deal with grief or pain, but too often I think we hold people at arms' length when we can gather them around us.

Jerry Ritcheson was a pillar of our church for many years. Just a marvelous fellow. On Friday he passed away very unexpectedly. On Friday Bill Denham, one of our pastors, was at the Ritcheson home with his wife Sherry and others. Then later in the afternoon I went over. I'll have to say that the house was full of people, full of friends, church folks, full of neighbors, and family. All these people were there and we were laughing and telling Jerry Ritcheson stories. There were a lot of funny stories about Jerry. I just could feel the sense of love and support in the room along with all the tears and sadness that were also there. And yet I realized that at the end of the night she would go to bed by herself. And there would be this aloneness.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus knew he had to go to the cross alone, but he reached out to the people he loved and who loved him. And we can do that in times of trial. We don't have to push people away and try to face it alone.

Here's the second thing. This is verse 36 and he begins his prayer saying, "Abba, Father." Abba is the word that means "daddy" and a term of endearment and affection. He claims God's love for him as a child of God.

In this moment he says, "Daddy. You are my Daddy."

When I'm in the grocery store sometimes I'll run across a family from the church and they have small children with them. And I do this thing too often that maybe you do, too. I crouch down to the kids and spread out my arms toward them and say with a big smile, "Hi!" They look shocked. They're terrified of this man who they don't really know. What they do then is run to hide into either Mom's shirt or hide behind Dad's leg. It's what you do when you're scared. You run to Mom or Dad. Well, that's what Jesus does. Daddy!

We have a new grandbaby in our house - it's number eleven. Not actually in our house, thankfully, but down the street a ways. Our 11th grandchild was born to my daughter Kendall and her husband Will. They have two other boys, and this grandson is named Jude Thomas.

What a great middle name, don't you think? Jude Thomas - Jude - like the disciple, not Judas, but Jude. There's also a book in the Bible named Jude. I'll be honest, it's probably more like the song "Hey, Jude! Don't make it bad!" That's probably where it came from. I wish it was from the Bible book but it's probably from the song.

Anyway, so while they were in hospital from Wednesday through yesterday, we kept the other two boys - Landrum, who's two and Pace who's four. That's really exhausting, I want you to know! Parenting is for young people than me!

One time in the midst of it Pace and Landrum got in a fight over a toy and Landrum thought the world was ending. And he starts sobbing uncontrollably and I can't understand what he's saying. He's crying so hard and then I try to comfort him. I finally got him to stop sobbing so I could understand his words. He said, "I want my daddy!" I thought to myself, "That's a prayer. That's what Jesus' prayer was in this moment of his incredible anguish - Abba! Daddy!"

Then he said, "For you all things are possible." He didn't just count on God's love for him; he put his hope in God, not in the world. He said, "You can do this, God."

Have you ever got to that place where you say to yourself, "I cannot solve this problem! I can't fix it - there's no button I can push, no decision I can make, there's nothing I can do that's going to magically make this go away. But God, you can. I can't, but you can." That's what Jesus is saying, "I believe in the possibility that you put in front of us, God. You can fix this."

I don't know if you've ever been to Arlington National Cemetery but it's such a powerful visual with all the markers in neat lines. There's the John F. Kennedy memorial there then right across from it is the Robert Kennedy memorial. And on it are two inscriptions. One of them is just a statement he made, where he said "every time you stand up for something that's right you send a ripple of hope through the world," that's always spoken to me.

The other quote is one he's most famous for although he took it from George Bernard Shaw actually. It was in one of his speeches. It says on the wall, "Some men see things as they are and ask why? I dream things that never were and ask why not."

To live in possibility, God, why not fix this? Why not make this right? Have you ever had the place in your life where you said, "Come on, God, you can do this!"

Emily Dickenson, the incredible poet, dealt with this terrible agoraphobia. She could not leave her house for long periods of time and when an older man who was a close family friend died she was heartbroken. But she couldn't bring herself to go to the memorial service. They

simply put her in a room beside the sanctuary of the church where the service was to be held. She was a devoted, committed believer in Jesus. She sat there in that room by herself with the door cracked so she could hear the service.

But she writes this poem: "I dwell in possibility." To believe even in the darkest moment that God can fix this. To put our hope in God, not in the world, not in what we see but what's unseen.

Jesus says, "Remove this cup." He expressed his honest real desire to God. "I don't want to do this."

Look, if the purpose of prayer - God's not a vending machine, we don't pray to God and God does it because we say so. The purpose of prayer is building a relationship, an intimate relationship with God. And if that's the purpose of prayer, then the key characteristic of prayer is honesty. You're not going to fool God. Some of the times we play games with our prayers. We say, "I'm going to say what I think God wants to hear," as if God's thinking, "Oh - well, I didn't know that." The truth is that we want to pour out our heart and our soul to the truth of what's inside us in our prayers to God. To be honest.

When I was in seminary, I did a CPE unit - Clinical Pastoral Education. And that's where you take a semester - I did it in the summer - and you work at a hospital as a chaplain. You're in a group of other students and there are other chaplains to work with you to train you. It's a really neat and growing experience. I did mine at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, it's like Ben Taub, it's a county hospital. All sorts of people are there, people very culturally different than me, many of them. Lots of indigent folks. I was trained to go into the room and ask the question, "What would you like me to pray for?"

These are folks who might have this sort of gritty faith. It's not fancy - it's gritty. I'd go into the room to say, as I was trained, and it wasn't a bad question to ask. I'd say, "So what would you like me to pray for?" And they'd look at me incredulously. As if to say, "What do you think I want you to pray for? I want to get well! Will you please pray that I get well! Isn't that the point of this?" They weren't thinking, "Well, I shouldn't be praying for myself, I should be praying for world peace." They were thinking, "I want to get well, come on!"

When we pray get real with God and tell the truth. "Remove this cup - I don't want to do this!" But he doesn't stop there, does he? He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I want but what you want."

Jesus submitted to God's purposes. He submitted.

My wife Dee likes to decorate our house, so she picks out stuff for the walls and paints the walls. She goes to Roundtop or Warrenton and buys what looks like junk to me when it comes back. When we first got married or just before we got married, I really felt like I should have a say-so in how the house was decorated. Why are you laughing? All the women just started immediately laughing! Like, "Are you crazy?" I thought I should have a say-so. I wanted Lay-Z-Boys. Apparently not. No Lay-Z-Boys in the house. And after you're married a while you realize that you should just give in! Just submit!

But here's the biggest part of that. Our house looks beautiful now. Because of her, not because of me. In other words, her will in this case was better than my will. God's will for you and for us is far superior to your will. To what you want. To what I want. God's purpose for my life is far superior to *my* purpose for my life. To submit is to say, "I believe I'll do what you want me to do. I've told you honestly what I want; I've shared my heart with you. But it's not what I want that matters. I'll submit to your will."

We were interviewing candidates to be a bishop. The delegation from the Texas Annual Conference are there and these candidates for bishop come in and shared who they are and things about themselves. It used to be a long time ago that these bishops' sort of emerged. They were nominated, they were brought up, they were lifted up, voted on. Now it's a campaign. They print up campaign brochures then they make little videos -"I want to become a bishop and here's why I believe I'm called to be a bishop..." So, they're coming in for interviews. This one guy came in and I had the first question every time. It was just one of those openers. I'd ask, "Tell us why you're called to the episcopacy now."

And this one fellow said, "I'm not sure I am." It thought to myself, "Well, that interesting, that's a different answer than I'm used to." And he said, "You know, it's really up to this body" - not just us but all the delegation from all around -"whether I'm called to the episcopacy or not. I believe that God is in this process and I submit to it. To say, it's not about my will, or whether I want to be a bishop, or I don't want to be a bishop, it's about whether I'm called by God to be a bishop. And I'll trust that process to make this decision. To submit to it."

It's not easy. I'll tell you that this whole scene in the Garden became so real for me when I was a teenager and came to Christ and listened to "Jesus Christ Superstar" over and over. I still listen to it every Holy Week. Yet the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane is so powerful. Jesus

says, "Why should I die? Will I be more noticed than I was before?" Then he says, "All right. I'll die. God, thy will is hard. You hold every card. Nail me to your tree and break me, bleed me, beat me, kill me, take me now before I change my mind. I submit."

The last thing that's here I think is so powerful too. I really hadn't noticed it before until this year. He says, "Get up! Let us be going! Let's do this!"

See, Jesus took action. Jesus didn't just say, "Okay, I'm a victim, come get me." He said, "Let's go, let's do this!" He took the initiative and the action and leaned into God's purposes for him even though they weren't what he wanted to do. He said, "Let's do this!"

I think sometimes what happens when we get into these moments of anguish, we sort of freeze up. We think, "I don't know what to do! I'm just going to sit here and see what happens." But the truth is that that's not what Jesus did. Jesus not only submitted but he leaned into that submission, leaned into that decision.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor during the 1930s and early 1940s. During that time the church in Germany had been co-opted by the Nazis, so it was a national church. It was all about the church supporting Hitler. Except for a group of people led primarily by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, primarily, who became what was known as the "Confessing Church." They resisted Hitler and were willing to say so aloud and resisted, kind of pushed back in the church against it being a national church.

By the way, Bonhoeffer ultimately was killed in the concentration camps. He was arrested and martyred in the camps.

In 1933 he preached his last sermon in Berlin and what he said really spoke to me. Listen to what he said, "If it were left to us, we would rather avoid the decisions which are forced upon us this day. If it were left to us, we would rather not be caught up in this struggle in the church which tears it apart. If it were left to us, we would rather not insist on the rightness of our cause. We would willingly avoid the terrible danger of exalting ourselves over others." In other words, he was saying, "I don't want to do this. Remove this cup."

He goes on. "But in fact, it is not, thank God, left to us. God has planned otherwise. No human hand builds the church but Christ alone. Whoever thinks he can build the church is already destroying it." He says, "Look. it's not my will but your will." But then he doesn't stop there. He says, "We shall confess, he shall build, we shall preach, he shall build. We shall pray,

he shall build. We do not know his plan. It may be that the times which by human standards are times of collapse are for him the times of great building."

In other words, "Let's do this! Let's go! Get up, let's be going. And let's see what God will do."

Friends, I don't know what times of trial you have been through or are in now. But I encourage you to keep this prayer handy for those times. Where we can honestly tell God what's in our heart and then submit to God's purposes.

Let's pray together. *Gracious and loving God, sometimes life can be really challenging. And we find ourselves just in places of anguish and don't know what to do. So, we honestly share our hearts with you, reaching out to those around us who love us. Putting our hope in you, believing that you can do anything. But then submitting to your will and giving ourselves fully to living as you have called us to live. Help us to do that, God. In the name of Christ, Amen.*