

## **GETHSEMANE – A Reflection.**

Jesus Prays in the Garden of Gethsemane.

**Texts:** Mark: 14: 32-41; Luke: 22: 39-46; Matthew 26: 36-46;  
John: 18: 1-3.

Jesus' public ministry was coming to an end. His identity as the Son of God, Prophet, Messiah, miracle worker and Teacher had grown since he began his ministry after he was baptised by John the Baptist. His ministry has taken him across Galilee and Judea and finally to Jerusalem where the Jewish Temple was located. Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (*Lk 19: 41-47*) and his cleansing of the Temple and prediction of its destruction (*Mt.24: 1-2. Lk.21: 5-6*) added to the growing anger against him from Religious leaders. Simultaneously political figures were plotting to arrest him as he was considered to be a threat to the peace of the city.

Finally Jesus and his disciples sit together for a last meal. He says farewell to them and predicts his betrayal by one of his disciples. After the meal Jesus invites his disciples to accompany him to the Mount of Olives to spend time in prayer.

### **The Setting:**

All four Gospels record events that occurred in what is referred to as the Garden of Gethsemane. The word 'Gethsemane' was derived from the Aramaic word for an olive press. The garden was located east of the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem on the slopes of the Mount of Olives where there was a large grove of olive trees. The Gospels indicate that this was where Jesus retired to from time to time to pray, to talk with his disciples and to find moments of rest. The Temple in Jerusalem would have been visible from this location. It was from the Mount of Olives that Jesus made the prediction of the destruction of the Temple. It was in this garden that he was betrayed by Judas and arrested by the soldiers.

Was it possible that the sight of the Temple, in the distance and the condemnation he received from its leaders added to Jesus' agony as he prayed? Did he recall his forty days spent in the wilderness at the commencement of his ministry when the Tempter used the Temple to test his faith and loyalty to God?

Today the word 'Gethsemane' is sometimes used in conversations to indicate a state of suffering. The chain of events that occurred in the Garden of Gethsemane and its significance in the life of Jesus seems to have receded.

### **The thoughts of an imagined Observer**

*My regular evening walk in the olive groves is a special time for me to relax, to think, to listen to the sounds of the dying day. Sometimes I meet others walking past. Sometimes I would see a man with a few friends walking slowly by as he talks with them. I am certain that there were times when I saw him kneeling by a rock and praying. Most times it looks as if he is looking towards our Temple. I wonder if he is a priest from the Temple.*

*There is something different about the surroundings tonight. The man is praying by the rock. I can see his silhouette. Further away I can see a small group of his friends asleep. I lean against a tree and watch them. I can see that the kneeling man is very troubled. Then he rises and walks to his friends who are still sleep. He wakes them and talks with them. He turns round and goes back to kneel at the rock and pray. He looks as if he is pleading with someone. He looks greatly stressed. He is wiping his face with his shawl. I am not sure if its sweat or tears that are running down his face. Once again he returns to his sleeping friends. He talks to them for a third time and returns to pray. His face seems less tortured now. He begins to look calmer. I wish I could talk with him. Perhaps find out why he is so troubled.*

*I walk away and leave the man and his friends. I guess I'll never know who he was and why he was so troubled.*

**PAUSE and reflect on the story.**

**Place yourself in the Garden of Gethsemane and watch.**

**What thoughts come to you when you see someone suffering? Do you wonder if you should help?**

### **The Gospels.**

Each of the four Gospels present a different approach to the recording of the life of Jesus. There are some events that are found in all four Gospels. There are some that appear in only one Gospel. However all of them witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The first three Gospels: **Mark, Matthew and Luke**, have similar wordings in many of the stories and words of Jesus. They are not considered to be eye-witness accounts. They are referred to as the Synoptics – derived from a Greek word meaning ‘seeing together.’

**The Gospel of John** is referred to as the Fourth Gospel. Its structure and focus centres around Jesus as the Word, who reveals who God is. John records a three year ministry which alternates between Galilee and Jerusalem. Details of the life of Jesus and theological insights included in his teaching cannot be separated. They work together to show the unity between God the Father and Jesus the Son.

### **The Texts**

Mark 14: 32-41 records Jesus’ prayers at a ‘place called Gethsemane’. It records the presence of Peter, James and John. His followers would see that his suffering was real. He says to them: **“Sit here while I pray”**. (vs 32).

He becomes agitated and says to them: **“I am deeply grieved even to death; remain here and keep awake.”** (vs 34).

Jesus leaves them, throws himself on the ground and prays: **“Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”** (vs 36)

He comes back to them and they are asleep. He says to Peter: ***“Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake for 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.”*** (vs 37) Jesus leaves them again to pray and comes back to find them sleeping again. He says: ***“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, the betrayer is at hand.”*** (vs 41).

Luke 22: 39-46. records Jesus going to the Mount of Olives as he was used to, and was followed by his disciples. He says to them: ***“Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”*** (vs 40).

He moved a short distance away, knelt and prayed: ***“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.”*** (vs 42). As he prayed he was deeply distressed. Luke records the appearance of an angel to minister to him. Jesus rose and went to his disciples who were asleep. He said: ***“Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”*** (vs 46).

Matthew 26: 36-46 records Jesus going to a ‘place called Gethsemane’ with his disciples. He says to them: ***“Sit here while I go over there and pray.”*** (vs 36).

He asks Peter, John and James – sons of Zebedee - to come with him. He is agitated and grieving as he says to them: ***“I am deeply grieved, even to death, remain here and stay awake with me.”***(vs38),

He walked a little further, threw himself on the ground and prayed: ***“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”***(vs39).

He returns to his disciples who are asleep. He says to Peter: ***“So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.”*** (vs 40/41).

Jesus walks away again and prays: ***“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”*** (vs 42).

He returns to his disciples who are asleep again. He leaves them, walks away and prays. He returns and says to them: ***“Are you sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”*** ( vs 45/46).

John 18:1-3: does not record Jesus praying in the garden. The verses record Jesus walking with his disciples to the Kidron Valley to a place where there was a garden. However John ch.17: 1-26 is a record of Jesus’ prayer that is referred to as the High Priestly Prayer. There is no evidence as to why the Synoptic Gospels did not include this prayer. John records Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer occurring while he was walking with his disciples to the Mount of Olives. The Synoptics mention Jesus in agony as he prays alone on the Mount of Olives. The two sets of prayers follow Jesus’ last meal with his disciples. They conclude with Jesus’ arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

**PAUSE. Read the passages from the 3 Synoptic Gospels.**

**Was Jesus being unfaithful by asking God to spare his suffering**

**Reflect on Jesus’ expectations of his disciples who continued to sleep through Jesus’ hour of need.**

**READ The Gospel of John ch. 17:1-26.**

## How important is prayer in personal life or in the life of the Faith Community?

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### WHY GOD, WHY?

*He was now about 100ks away from his home. He had ceased noticing his surroundings or which little town he was in as he re-filled petrol into his car. Noticing a small motel across the road he drove in, parked and walked to the reception desk. Minutes later he was in a room with the bare essentials in it. Feeling emotionally drained he threw himself on the bed. He closed his eyes and felt tears running down his face.*

*In a suburban home miles away the mother held her 5 year old son in her arms and rocked him. She had no longer had tears as she held him close. Her arms were stiff from being in the same position since they returned from the hospital. Was it 2 hours or 5 hours ago? She didn't know. It didn't matter. Her lips moved in soundless prayer as they had done since her son was diagnosed with leukaemia. At first, together with her husband, they had made plans to ask for a second diagnosis. The verdict that his cancer was spreading rapidly and that there was nothing more that was medically possible was a severe blow to their hopes of a cure.*

*As the weeks passed the little boy lost his energy and his appetite. He would look at his parents with pain in his eyes pleading for help. At such times they felt more helpless than ever. No easy answers came to them. Family and friends visited often and offered help. They would do what they could and go away. A small group at her mother's church had formed a prayer roster to pray for her son. The silence between husband and wife was increasing. Their son's pleading eyes were destroying their relationship. She had kept praying looking for signs that God was listening to her pleas. She wanted to believe that her prayers would give her hope – hope that modern medicine would bring a cure. She knew that praying gave no guarantee of healing. Yet she prayed as the child in her arms faded away. Somewhere deep within her she began to feel that God was close to them. That her son would be safe.*

*In his room in the motel the father continued to shed tears. He knew he should have stayed with his son and wife. He knew he should have given more support. He knew. He felt the anguish erupting from within him. He heard himself shout: “Why God, Why?” No answer came. Only the silence stayed with him*

**PAUSE. Can suffering or pain strengthen a person's faith in God?**

**Is it God's will that one should experience suffering?**

**When prayers go unanswered is it God's will**

Suggested reading:

All quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

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