

St. Matthew 26:40-41

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Sermon Hymn for this Sunday is a favorite: "Go To Dark Gethsemane". I chose it because of the obvious reference to our text and sermon theme as stated in the first stanza: "Go to dark Gethsemane, All who feel the tempter's power; Your Redeemer's conflict see, Watch with Him one bitter hour; Turn not from His griefs away; Learn from Jesus Christ to pray."

It sums up everything we are considering this morning in a few words. And, oh, what words; especially these: "Turn not from His griefs away". People have that tendency, don't they; **to avoid** the sufferings of others because....well....because....they're so "negative" - so intrusive on the life long quest for the "positive" of this world, the good times, the **want** to ignore suffering and death and....what's to come?.

But, you see, it's one of God's most profound questions . . .

COULD YOU NOT WATCH WITH ME?

I. The Setting.

I'm guessing that it would be easy for some to remove themselves from the depth of what Jesus experienced at Gethsemane. After all, this is the God-Man and, surely, His suffering was something He could control. Right? **GOD!** - Man. Our reasoning is always frayed because of our fallen nature. So, let's take a look at what precedes our text:

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here, while I go over there and pray.' And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." (vss. 36-39)

Can we grasp the words: *sorrowful...troubled...even to death...fell on his face and prayed?* Sounds all too human, wouldn't you say? And you know what underscores the depth of His suffering? He didn't deserve it. Any of it. Scriptures say, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21)

There was that moment prior to our text when we're told:

And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day." (Matt. 20:17-19)

You see, that was the penalty God would impose on the only One Who could intercede for us and address the fact that we still sin day after day after day...and on...and on; that humans are unworthy and undeserving of any goodness, love or affection from a Holy God.

It's easy for us to conclude that Jesus - the God/Man - could endure such suffering. But, you see, the fact that He was and is God didn't make His suffering something less - more bearable - easy to handle. He had to be God. Only God could pay for every sin of every sinner. He had to be man because man sinned against God. The payment for that sin would have to receive the punishment, death and hell humans deserve. **Could you not watch?!**

I'll quote it again: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21) I don't know how you see it, but I find it easy to understand. From Luke's Gospel: "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Lk. 22:44) It's medically accurate under extreme situations. The bloody sweat. For us.

II. The Question.

Our text:

And he came to his disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, you could not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Could you not watch with me? There is no doubt. Christ wanted to be alone with His Father in prayer, and yet, at the same time, He did not want to be alone. Have you ever experienced this? The soul cries out to God. The flesh wants the presence of others to help it through. We dare not minimize the struggle Christ endured.

But there's another aspect to this question from God. It's tied to these words: "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Do you see? His selfless concern continues. Is that straight? This is not about "poor Jesus!" This is about our sin and the love of Christ for us that would address that sin.

But sleep, rest, a sorrowful lethargy had set in with these disciples. And the result of this sleepiness: One of them would tear away from the Lord's captors and run naked out of the garden. The "Rock", Simon Peter, would deny Him three times. They would all abandon Him - run - and hide. They missed it, didn't they? "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

III. So, What Are We Doing Here?

At Gethsemane, we are to back up a stone's throw and quite likely see some other disciples: Ourselves. And there stands the warning - the warning against the sleepiness and slow death caused by spiritual lethargy. Jesus speaks to us: "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

Christ has overcome sin, death and hell for us and we are ever so thankful. But, the words of Peter scream at us: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8) And that "someone" is not one of those who could care less about God's love in Christ. The "someone" is one of us. Any one of us. Everyone!

The evil and filth spewing forth from this world are vivid reminders of the intensification of this world's coming end. Jesus words are clearly materializing before our eyes: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." (Matt. 24:21)

Could you not watch with me? is the question our Savior puts in front of us this morning. Clarence E. MacCartney wrote:

Thousands of men are wrecked on the hill of what they considered improbable, if not impossible, temptations. When the thing has happened, men say, "Who would have thought it?" "The last person in the world I would have supposed..." and so on.

And so, we come back to our sermon hymn for one more moment; the words: “Turn not from His griefs away; Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.” I know...I know...”Can’t we focus on something more upbeat and positive” will be the cry of the many. We could - if eternity wasn’t in the balance - if we were sinless and ceased to re-hash the same wicked thoughts, words and deeds - if we ceased the same putting our Lord on the back burner while we busily intensify our pursuits of comfort and convenience and contentment with this world.

On the contrary, the real *Positive* is in the Garden praying. And calling us to watchful prayer. To vigilance! Lifting us. Not to an improved world that will come to its end no matter what, but to the eternal life He wins for us through His suffering and death in payment for our sin!

John Donne was a 16th to 17th century poet and cleric of the Church of England. He wrote the following I have enjoyed reading over the years:

I shall rise from the dead, from the prostration (from the powerlessness), from the prostration (from the dejection) of death, and never miss the sun, which shall be put out, for I shall see the Son of God, the Sun of Glory, and shine myself as that sun shines. I shall rise from the grave, and never miss this city, which shall be nowhere, for I shall see the city of God, the new Jerusalem. I shall look up and never wonder when it shall be day, for the angel will tell me that time shall be no more, and I shall see and see cheerfully that last day of judgment, which shall have no night, never end, and be united to the Ancient of Days, to God Himself, who had no morning, never began. (*The Works of John Donne, D. D.*, by Henry Alford, London, John W. Parker, West Strand, Vol. V)

The question God asks is: “Could You Not Watch With Me?” The answer? We must!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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Could You Not Watch With Me?”**

I. The Setting.

II. The Question.

III. So, What Are We Doing Here?

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