

Trinity Baptist Church
Maundy Thursday, 1st April 2021, Communion service
Luke 22:39-53; Yet Not My Will, But Yours Be Done

Chronologically, I'm doing things in the wrong order tonight, because I want to read and speak now about events in the Garden of Gethsemane *after* the Passover meal, and then return to the Passover itself when we take communion together. Luke 22:39-53.

[Read Luke 22:39-53]

39Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40On reaching the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you will not fall into temptation.' 41He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.' 43An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

45When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46'Why are you sleeping?' he asked them. 'Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.'

47While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, 48but Jesus asked him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'

49When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, 'Lord, should we strike with our swords?' 50And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

51But Jesus answered, 'No more of this!' And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

52Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, 'Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? 53Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour – when darkness reigns.'

[Pray]

I wonder, what is the hardest decision you've ever had to make? For me, it was possibly when I was first called into ministry. There are other decisions I thought about a lot before making them, like the decision to become a Christian and the decision to ask Fiona to marry me. But that first call to ministry, during a Christian Union weekend away, came so unexpectedly and so strongly that I had to really wrestle with it in prayer throughout the weekend and on a number of subsequent occasions. Someone had actually suggested it to me a couple of years prior to that, and my internal reaction then was "Absolutely no way, ever!" That was no longer my reaction when God actually called me, but it was still a lot to take in and work through, before I could answer, "Yes, Lord," and know that I meant it.

1) The Moment of Truth

But that was nothing compared to the weight of the decision that *Jesus* took on this night in the Garden of Gethsemane. This was the moment of truth. This was the point when our salvation most hung in the balance. Jesus had an astronomically big decision to make. Yes, in many ways he had already chosen this course. In heaven before the world began, the Son of God chose to die for the people he would make. And he began to carry through that plan as he was incarnated as a full human being. Then, he chose the path of obedience to God every moment of his earthly life such that he could be our sacrifice. In his baptism he chose to identify with sinful humanity, and under extreme temptation in the wilderness he chose to not sin. But in all those instances, the actual event of the crucifixion was still a way off. Now, at this moment, Jesus knew it was just hours away. The human Jesus had to choose again to finish the work he had come to do by way of the cross.

And it was a real choice! Matthew records Jesus' words that he could have called upon his Father to send twelve legions of angels to come to his aid, and they would have immediately been dispatched, such is the love of God the Father for his Son (Matt 26:53). But that would have been curtains for our salvation, and it would have been a failure to fulfil what God had

called him to do. This was crunch time: salvation or no salvation. For there is no other means by which we could be saved other than for Jesus to shed his blood for us on the cross.

Jesus had a decision to make, and the only way he could make that decision was to take it to God in prayer (as he always did with all decisions). In this he is an example to us, both in the *fact* of working out his decisions in prayer, and in the *manner* of his praying.

Luke's account is my favourite telling of this moment because it most clearly portrays the *agony* that Jesus went through as he made that life-and-death decision. "Father ... take this cup from me" is a real cry! The cup is a picture of suffering and Jesus was completely honest in his prayer about his pain and his desires. He did not want to go to the cross! Indeed, so intense was his anguish over this decision that he sweat drops of blood. Luke, the doctor, notes this extremely rare condition. Today it is called hematidrosis, and it is an extreme fight-or-flight reaction to stress, in which the capillary glands burst, and the ensuing blood is sweated out of the body, often from the forehead. Jesus' decision caused such anguish he sweat drops of blood. And Luke notes that an angel was sent to strengthen him, such was his need.

Have no doubt about it, Jesus cried out to his Father for a way out of this. The caveat "if you are willing" does not in any way diminish the force of his desperate cry; though it does, even within that cry, signify a willingness to submit to his Father's will – indeed to his own will in everything leading up to this moment – and it therefore paves the way for his total surrender of will to come. Jesus, thus, provides the model for all the Christian martyrs who would follow him and for all who suffer for his name. But that begins with his complete honesty with God in prayer. The reality of the threat must be acknowledged, and the pain of it felt, if it is to be truly overcome. Then we can also learn from Jesus' submission to his Father's will in spite of the threat.

2) The Accepted Path

Of course, the threat to *Jesus* and the suffering *he* was choosing to accept to follow God's path for him were immeasurably greater than anything we, or any other human, can ever face. There were the very *human* elements of that suffering, certainly. There was the *betrayal* by a close friend – and betrayal by such an intimate act as a kiss! How that must have stabbed at his heart like a knife. He knew Judas was going to betray him, but the heartless *means* of betrayal seems to have taken even Jesus aback. Then there was the *abandonment* of Jesus by all his other closest friends at his hour of greatest need – only hinted at by Luke when Jesus warns them to pray so they would not fall into temptation, but more clearly articulated by other Gospel writers. There was the intense *physical* suffering he was about to undergo. It has been well documented that the Romans had honed the pain of crucifixion such that it was one of the most excruciatingly torturous means of death ever known to man – indeed it is the source of our word "excruciating." Hours and hours of whole-body torture! And then there was the *emotional* shame – the taunts, the jeers, the exposure before the baying crowd.

All of this must itself have caused great terror to Jesus as he anticipated it. But others have also faced such trauma. What makes *Jesus'* suffering unique and far beyond anything any other human could suffer is very purpose for which he suffered – to bear our sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 declares, "God made him who had *no* sin to *be* sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." All of God's righteous wrath at all the sin of every human who has ever lived or will ever live was directed at *Jesus* in those hours on the cross. As though the sin were his own, not ours! Indeed, it had now become his own to bear. No wonder he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46)!

The anticipation of all of this caused Jesus to pray in anguish and desperation, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me"! And at that moment, our salvation hung in the balance, until Jesus found the strength to set his will to his Father's will again, "yet not my will, but yours be done." Other Gospels show Jesus wrestling with this question three times before finally reaching his settled decision. I always feel great emotion when I reach this point in the Gospels, because it was at *this* moment that the human Jesus chose you and me above himself. From this moment of decision, borne out of his

wrestling in prayer, our salvation was utterly assured. Because *now* Jesus had the strength and the resolve to go to the cross and complete the work of reconciling us to God.

3) The Victory Secured

From this moment the victory was won. For us and for our salvation. Victory over sin, as he offered himself as an atoning sacrifice so that, through faith in him, our sin could be forgiven and removed from us as far as the East is from the West. Victory over sickness and death, which are the judgement of God upon human sin, because Jesus took that judgement in place of us. Victory over isolation from God, because his blood removes the barrier of sin that makes us hide from God and makes his presence dangerous to us. Victory over condemnation, for “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). We live in freedom because he chose to die nailed to a cross and unable to move. What appropriate response is there to this, except to simply say, “Thank you Jesus; from now on, not my will, but yours be done”?

I want to close with a story told during a homily by Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, the former archbishop of Paris. It concerned a group of boys in Orleans, in France, in 1939, who, for a lark, dared each other to go inside the church and confess a made-up list of terrible sins to the priest in the confessional.

A Jewish boy named Aaron took up the challenge. But the wise priest quickly worked out what was going on. Instead of getting angry, he gave Aaron a simple penance: to go up the altar, kneel before the large image of Jesus crucified that hung above it, and say three times while looking at it, “Jesus, I know you died for me. But I don’t give a damn.”

“Hah! Easier than I thought,” Aaron told himself. So he went up the altar to do his penance.

“Jesus, I know you died for me. But I don’t give a damn,” he shouted.

“Jesus, I know you died for me. But I don’t give a damn,” he declared a second time.

“Jesus, I know you died for me. But I don’t give ...” He could not go on.

The following year, Aaron was baptized and took the name “Jean-Marie.” “And,” Cardinal Lustiger wrapped up the story, “that boy is standing here now, speaking to you.”

There are many who ridicule Jesus and Christian faith with little to no knowledge of what they ridicule. Yet, Jesus’ sacrifice for us is simply phenomenal and incredibly powerful when we truly confront its meaning! The only appropriate response is to bow the knee before him and to say, “Thank you Jesus. From now on, not my will, but yours be done.” Amen?

[Pray]