

Lent Reflection Week 6
Faith and Trust in the Will of God – Gethsemane

⁷ During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (*Hebrews 5:7-9*)

This is the last in our Lent series on faith. As we move into Holy Week we will be reflecting on Jesus' response to the will of God in the Garden of Gethsemane.

As we start our reflection, take some time to sit quietly and pray as you listen to Margaret Rizza's [Keep Watch With Me - YouTube](#)

Read: Mark 14: 32-42

[Mark 14: 32-42 NIV - Gethsemane - They went to a place - Bible Gateway](#)

So often, when speaking about Jesus we are told that he is with us in our troubles, that he knows what it is to suffer. To be able to believe this to be true, we have to understand that Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human. In Hebrews Chapter 2 we read:

⁹ We see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted".

It is the human Jesus who went where he could find peace to throw himself on God's mercy and ask that the terrible ordeal facing him could be somehow cancelled out. It is the human Jesus, who just like us, had to find the faith to trust completely in the will of God.

Being born of Mary, Jesus became like us, a little lower than the angels while at the same time retaining his divine nature as the Son of God. This narrative gives us one of the most intimate pictures of Jesus' relationship with his Father as well as the cost of his mission to the world. It brings together the reality of his human nature with the uniqueness of his position as the Son of God. At the same time, it exposes the weakness of the disciples as they fail him at this crucial point in his earthly life. The same disciples who were with him at the Transfiguration are with him now, and even though they have previously declared their

readiness to share his destiny with him (see Matthew 20:22 and 26:35), even at the level of supporting him as he prepares for the fate which awaits him, they fail.

As we read this account of Jesus wrestling in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, we can clearly see some things about Jesus the man. We can see the emotional agony he is in as he contemplates death at the age of 33. No-one wants to die so young when there is so much more of life to be experienced. And certainly, no-one wants to contemplate the kind of death that awaited Jesus. He knew what crucifixion was like and probably shuddered at the thought of it. We can see here the struggle Jesus undergoes to submit his will to the will of God. We see in Jesus the great courage it took to willingly step forward to obey his Father's will. That is a struggle we can empathise with, though perhaps not in such extreme circumstances.

Pause here for a few moments to reflect on times when you have had to let go of something you wanted to follow God's will for you.

For me, this is one of the most poignant passages in the whole Bible. It feels so because it seems to intrude into the private agony of Jesus. As with the account of his forty days being tempted in the wilderness, at some point he must have shared his experiences for us to be able to read about them now. After the events in the Upper Room Jesus must have wanted to be somewhere quiet and private to spend time with his trusted friends preparing himself for the ordeal which lay ahead. He asked his friends to keep watch while he prayed. We are told that "he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' he said to them. 'Stay here and keep watch.'" (vv 33-34). But they were so exhausted with all that had happened over the past few days that they could not stay awake. Even though Jesus repeatedly woke them, they let him down by falling asleep. That left Jesus to face these remaining hours before his arrest alone. This is true for us as well. There are times and occasions in life that we have to face on our own, but in that loneliness, there is the presence of the one, who in Gethsemane, experienced it and came through it.

In this moment he needed human fellowship and fellowship with God. Mark tells us that the sleeping disciples "did not know what to say to him". In times of trouble, we all need someone we trust to be with us. Not necessarily to say or do anything, just to be present with us. Sadly, his friends, who so short a time before had been declaring that they would die for him, could not even stay awake to keep watch while he prayed.

The translations we have don't do justice to how Jesus was really feeling. The original Greek, rather than his soul being overwhelmed with grief, gives us deeply grieved. It echoes the refrain in Psalms 42 and 43: "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?" Jesus knows there is no turning back. As ever, the Psalms give him words to express his torment. The refrain finishes with "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God". Jesus knows that his hope and trust in God will eventually be vindicated, yet as he awaits his horrific execution, as a man he needs the company and moral support of his friends. This is the paradox of the incarnation – fully God, yet fully man with all the doubt and fear that goes with being human.

Let's turn our attention to Jesus' prayer. Matthew gives us a small detail which is missing from Mark's account. He tells us that Jesus "fell with his face to the ground, and prayed" (Matthew 26:39). This is the only place in Scripture where we hear of Jesus prostrating himself before God. This is an indication of the strength of the emotions which lead him to prayer. Mark only tells us that "he fell to the ground" (v35).

Jesus prays three times in the garden. In his first prayer he asks 'if possible'. It is a tentative request. How often have we asked someone in authority 'if possible', knowing in our hearts already that the answer is no? Jesus moves swiftly on from that plea to a firmer 'your will be done'. This is a direct echo of the prayer he taught his disciples and one which we pray daily – 'your kingdom come; your will be done'.

When Jesus prays, he calls the Father Abba. It is an intimate name, a name used in the Middle East by a young child to its father; an everyday family word which no-one else ever used to address God. But Jesus did. He spoke to his heavenly Father in as trustful and as intimate a way as any child to its father. This is an intimate conversation, one full of affection and devotion. The use of the name Abba shows clearly the trust a child has for its father. He called out to Abba, to the father he trusted and obeyed his will. He did not turn aside or turn back but went forward in faith putting his life into his Father's hands.

Let's think now about these three disciples, Peter, James and John. What do you do when the strong person in your life suddenly becomes weak? It happens more frequently than we might like to admit. Children face this when the parent on whom they have relied for everything is suddenly struck down with illness or grief. Colleagues working on a project are thrown into confusion if the team leader suddenly loses confidence. A church is dismayed if the leader they rely on to help them strengthen their faith suddenly struggles with their own faith, or loses hope, or integrity. One of the deepest impressions made on us as we grow up is the realisation that someone who we've always seen as strong and dependable can also be very vulnerable. This was the realisation that these three disciples had in Gethsemane. They had seen Jesus sad; they'd seen him frustrated, they'd seen him angry, they'd seen him at odds with his family but they had never seen him like this. He was a man facing the worst ordeal imaginable that would end in his own death and in those moments, he did not want to. We see him here struggling, fighting a spiritual battle as he had when facing the Devil in the wilderness. He has asked his closest friends to wait with him, to watch over him as he faces this darkest of times. We can empathise, because in our own lives we have sat with people we love as they face up to the realities of a terminal diagnosis, bereavement, loss of a marriage etc. Not speaking necessarily, but watching and waiting. We can be sure of Jesus' presence with us in these moments because he has suffered these moments himself.

We ourselves understand the effect on the disciples of the sudden change that had come over Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Until that moment he had been in control, planning, directing, teaching, guiding. He had always been ready with a word or action. Now here he is, questioning God, asking him to change his mind, to take this awful cup from him.

“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”. A condition I suspect that we are all familiar with. The issue is not whether he should accept the Father’s purpose, but whether that purpose need include the horrifying ‘cup’ (again Matthew 20:22) of self-sacrifice for others, or if there is some other way in which God’s purpose could be fulfilled. Jesus is not asking God to change his plan for the salvation of the world, just that it might be achieved another way. His trust in God is such that he knows the answer will be no, but his relationship with his Father allows him to express his doubt and his fear without letting go of his faith and trust. A lesson for us all.

The scene is so intimate and frightening that we feel almost embarrassed to be onlookers. Jesus’ own horror and the disciples’ sleepy dismay, are raw human emotion, naked and unadorned. This is a unique story, and it is only when we enter into it that we can understand the human and theological depths in it.

Pause now and reflect on when you have prayed for the strength to face what lies ahead and any times when you have tried to face challenges without turning to God.

Jesus comes through a time of great struggle, a three times repeated prayer for rescue; eventually, it seems, he hears from the one he calls ‘Abba, Father’ the answer: No. If even Jesus received that answer to one of his most heartfelt prayers, we should not be surprised if sometimes it’s that way for us too.

Gethsemane invites us to consider, above all, what it meant for Jesus to be, in a unique sense, God’s son. The very moment of greatest intimacy – the desperate prayer to ‘Abba, Father’ – is also the moment where, hearing the answer ‘No’, he is set on the course for the moment of God forsakenness on the cross - “And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) Mark 15:34

This account of Jesus’ distress invites us to stop and ponder, once more, where we ourselves belong. Are we, like the disciples, full of bluster one minute, sleep the next, and confused shame the next? Are we ready to betray Jesus if it suits our other plans, or if he fails to live up to our expectations? Or are we prepared to keep watch with him in the garden, sharing his anguished prayer? We are not called to repeat his unique moment of suffering; he went through that alone on behalf of us all. But as Christian writers like Paul from the very beginning have seen, it is part of normal Christian experience that we, too, should be prepared to agonise in prayer as we await our own complete redemption and that of all creation in the same faith and trust that Jesus demonstrated. The church is called to live in the middle of this great scene: surrounded by confusion, false loyalty, direct attack and traitor’s kisses, those who name the name of Christ must stay in the garden with him until the Father’s will is done.

Take a few moments to reflect on those times when the answer God has given to you is not the one you wanted. What was the result of God’s answer to you?

John 12:27-28 says “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

In the garden Jesus faced up to what God was calling him to do. To sacrifice his own life so that our lives, the lives of the entire human race could be saved. To sacrifice his life in an unimaginably terrible way so that our relationship with God could be restored. For Jesus, this was a point of no return. When he had finished praying, he roused his sleeping disciples with these words: “Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Mark 14:41-42). If he had turned away at that moment, then the salvation of the whole world would have been at risk and God’s plan frustrated. He chose to follow the will of God, trusted in the plan that God had made. Jesus was courageous. His time of prayer had strengthened him and given him the courage to face what was to come next. Jesus went willingly to the cross. He went willingly because he had faith and trusted his Father implicitly

As we finish our reflection, you might like to listen again Margaret Rizza’s [Keep Watch With Me - YouTube](#)