

Message for March 28, 2021

Walk Through Holy Week 6 - The Garden

Mark 14.32-42

During Lent, we have taken six weeks to move through one week—the last week of Jesus’ human life. This has allowed us to expand time—to “freeze frame” important moments and dig deeper into our faith story, and our own stories. This morning marks the end of Lent and the beginning of our commemoration of Holy Week, and so let us speed up time a bit as we first remember the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem.

We found our place in the parade and considered OUR place in the picture—our role as supporters of Jesus’ mission in the world. And then we found ourselves in the midst of the chaos and throngs of people in Jerusalem for the Passover. We stopped there... suspending the action for a moment, wondering how we could join Jesus in clearing out our own lives and hearts, our own places of worship, to make them a more welcoming place for the love of God to reside fully. We followed Jesus as he continued to teach in the city and among the people at the temple. His teachings filled our hearts as they filled those long ago, and we remembered the call to proclaim justice in the midst of injustice wherever we find it. We joined the disciples at a table of extravagant affection and overflowing love, and then another supper where all our assumptions about the way the world works were turned upside-down. This week, we join Jesus in the Garden

Gethsemane is the moment when a chain of events begins that cannot be halted. Once Jesus is taken into custody, there is no going back. So we pause a moment with him in the garden just before his arrest, and we feel with him the temptations that arise when facing difficult circumstances—to run, hide, use whatever power we have to change things, fight it, perhaps even bargain with God. We walk among the sleepy disciples who just can’t grasp what is about to happen.¹

¹ Opening comments from worship resource *Entering the Passion of Jesus - Picturing Ourselves in the Story, Week 6: The Garden* by Marcia McFee © www.worshipdesignstudio.com/passion

So much of this year has felt like a chain of events that can't be halted. We've tried. So hard. We've physically distanced, and socially isolated. We've masked and sanitized. We've worked from home, gone to school online, adjusted as much as we can. And we're tired of it all. We've done all the right things and it still feels like it wasn't enough. With the vaccination roll out, we can see the end in sight, but it is not yet. We're lonely. We miss each other, and hugs. We're exhausted and empty.

And here is where we meet Jesus in the Garden. Deeply grieved. Praying that this hour might pass. We can relate. Jesus prays. When he is distressed and troubled, Jesus falls on the ground and calls out to God. "I don't want to do this anymore! But I know it is what needs to happen. So, let your will be done." When we are uncertain, filled with sorrow, Jesus shows us the way. We are allowed to be sad. We're allowed to be afraid. We're allowed to be human. Naming our humanity is a prayer. Crying out in lament is a prayer. Calling out for courage is a prayer. We need prayer to sustain us, to help us find courage, to lament.

In between his prayers Jesus goes back to his bubble. Maybe to check on them, or to encourage them, or maybe to get encouragement from his closest friends. Every time, he found them sleeping. There could be a lot of reasons for that. It might be because they have had an emotional and intense week. They're wrung out. Or perhaps it is because they've just had a holiday meal, with all the wine and food and conversation. They're worn out. It's possible that they know what is ahead of them and they just don't want to face it. They're not ready. So the sleep, whether that is from weariness or warmth and goodwill, or worry, we don't know. When Jesus returns, they don't know what to say. Perhaps in this time of despair, there are no words.

Only prayer.

So, I invite us to pray, with these words written by our United Church Moderator, The Right Reverend Dr. Richard Bott:

Holy One,

it's been a year.

A *year* since the pandemic

hit this part of the world,

and we realized that -

for the safety of each other

and all of our neighbours -

we needed to be a congregation

that wouldn't congregate.

Well, not in-person, at least.

We've found other ways-

Old technologies like paper mail,

and new technologies like Zoom,

we've found ways of being together,

with each other,

and with you.

It's not the same -

and there are parts of it

that we're missing -

but...

we've found ways to

live the ministry you have given us,

to be Jesus's disciples,

to share your love,

with each other and

with the whole world.

We remember those who have died from the virus.

We remember those who are ill.

We remember the healthcare workers, the researchers, the grocery clerks, the delivery drivers - all who must work for the care of the world in their own way.

We remember all those who are grieving.

All those who are afraid.

All those who wait.
And we pray.
So, on this anniversary, we ask
that you would help us to
recognize each other
and to *know* that, in all of this,
you have been, are,
and always will be
with every part of your creation.
Give us strength to keep on.
Give us grace in our frustrations.
Give us hope for tomorrow.
Give us life, and life abundant,
that we might be people
who live it in the world.
Physically distanced,
but socially together;
faces masked,
but hearts open;
hands washed,
but ready to get to the work you have for us -
we pray.
In Jesus' name,
carried by the wings of the Holy Spirit
enmeshed in the Creator's love,
we pray.
Amen.