

“Thy Will Be Done”

Matthew 26:36-46

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 12, 2014

Have you ever had to do something that you knew would be really hard? Think about the hardest thing you've ever had to face. Maybe it was a family member or coworker you had to confront about something. Or maybe it was a medical diagnosis or a legal problem or the loss of a job. I am certain that every one of us has faced at least some challenges in life. Jesus said in John 16, “In this life you will have troubles.”

So if you've had to face some difficulty you know the anxiety that can come from it. The stress can come from the uncertainty about what's going to happen. How will the other person react? What will the diagnosis be? Will the treatment work? But the stress or anxiety can also come from actually knowing what's coming and not wanting that to happen.

That's what we find in today's passage. Jesus has just finished his last supper with the disciples where he told them that one of them would betray him and that all of them would abandon him. Now they have gone out to a place called Gethsemane, which means place of the olive press. This was a clearing on the Mount of Olives where there was a stone olive press where they would squeeze the olive oil from the olives. It was a most appropriate place for Jesus to go and pray in agony.

The way olives were processed was that they would first crush them with a large, round, mill stone. The oil was collected as it ran into a small trough out of the press. Today we would call the oil from this first press “extra virgin olive oil.” But there is still plenty of oil left in the olives. So they would take the olives, layer them with a cloth like burlap, and stack them in a stone basin. Then a huge stone was placed on top. The weight of that stone would slowly press all the oil out of the olives.

In a sense, Jesus is experience a similar weight upon him pressing him. Jesus knows what is about to happen and it made him “sorrowful and troubled.” He said, “My soul is

very sorrowful, even to death.” As we have seen throughout Matthew, Jesus is truly God. A lot of people have trouble believing that. They see Jesus as just a good teacher who demonstrated God's love. But we see over and over in the gospels that Jesus does things that only God can do like heal leprosy, walk on water, and forgive sins. He knows what people are thinking. He has told his disciples what will happen to him and to them. He claims to be God and he proves it.

However, Jesus is also fully human and some people have trouble believing *that*. One of the earliest heresies the Church faced was called Docetism, which was the idea that Jesus only *appeared* to be human. In today's passage we see clearly the humanity of Jesus. We find his humanity in other places in the gospels, also. We know that Jesus got hungry and thirsty. He got tired. At one point he was so tired he fell asleep on a boat in the middle of a thunderstorm. Jesus also experienced emotions. He wept at Lazarus' grave and also for Jerusalem. He became angry at the money changers. Here Jesus experiences anguish. He is facing the cross and he's feeling the weight of what he must do, much like the weight of the olive press.

It's not just the torture and crucifixion that is weighing on him. It's much more. He prays, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” What is the cup? In the Bible, the image of a cup represents God's wrath. Jesus' agony comes from knowing that he must bear the weight of all our sin. He must experience the wrath of God. He must offer his sinless life as punishment for our sin. Let me just point out that this is not some kind of divine “child abuse” as some people would claim. Jesus is God the Son and so he is equal with God the Father. He willingly goes to the cross to accomplish his purpose of reconciling God and sinners. But it's still painful. 2 Corinthians 5:21

tells us that he was made to be sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. What Jesus faced was the hardest thing anyone in the history of the world has faced and he is the only person in history capable of facing it.

So what can you and I learn from Jesus about how to face difficulties in our own lives? I think the first thing we learn is the importance of *prayer*. If Jesus needed prayer how could we get by without it? Here Jesus teaches us how to pray in the face of difficulties. In this passage we see Jesus go off and pray three different times. He also says to Peter, “could you not watch with me one hour?” I think the point is that Jesus prayed for a long time, not just a quick prayer. Jesus told Peter, James and John to “watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” I suspect very few of us, myself included, spend enough time in prayer. As the old hymn goes, “Oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.” The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5, “pray without ceasing” and in Ephesians 6, “pray at all times and in all circumstances.”

Notice also that Jesus addresses God as “My Father.” His prayer reflects a deep personal relationship with God the Father. In fact, in Mark’s gospel Jesus says, “Abba, Father.” Another way to say that would be “daddy.” God is not some far-away, disinterested being. Jesus invites us all to call God Father, to have that kind of close relationship with him. But, like any close relationship, we must spend time with God to develop that closeness.

We also see that Jesus’ prayer is much like the Lord’s Prayer. He prays, “My Father.” He repeatedly prays, “not my will but your will be done.” Jesus asks that he not have to “drink the cup.” Sometimes that’s our prayer as well. We ask God to change our circumstances so that we won’t have to go through something difficult. One of the temptations we face is to think that since the circumstances haven’t changed that God hasn’t answered. Sometimes, though, God’s answer is “no.” Jesus didn’t get

what he asked for. But he received the strength to go through it. If God tells you no it’s because he loves you and knows what’s best for you.

The second thing we learn from Jesus in Gethsemane is the importance of companionship during hard times. My grandmother used to say, “misery loves company but company never reciprocates.” Jesus needed to pray alone but he wanted his closest friends to be nearby, praying for him and with him. He needed to know that they were there supporting him. One of the most moving passages in the whole Bible is Job 2:11-13. Satan has taken everything from Job – his family, his home, his livelihood, and now his health. Three of his friends hear about it and they come to comfort him. The Bible says, “they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.” When we are going through something difficult, it’s important to have the company of people who love us and support us. We don’t need them to “fix” anything. We just need their presence and “moral support.”

We can’t eliminate all hard things from our lives. There will be challenges that each of us will face. But as we’ve seen, we have a Lord and Savior who understands what we’re going through. We worship a God who has been through the worst of the worst. So as the writer of Hebrews says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” When those times come, let’s gather with each other for comfort and turn to God in prayer, willing to say, “not as I will, but as you will.”

Amen.