



This story of Jesus is holy ground.

The will of the Father has led Jesus finally to this night and his time is running out. Soon his hour will be upon him, the time of his death.

They had just celebrated the Passover meal together. Jesus lifted the cup, saying, “**Drink from it, all of you.**” Judas departs.

Jesus’ life is now measured in hours, his final hours. In less than a couple hours probably, his will be arrested, the disciples will scatter in fear, Jesus will endure a mockery of a trial, he will face scourging and torture, and finally death.

Jesus is fully aware all of this is awaiting him.

In great distress, having put in motion the final piece...releasing Judas to his betrayal, Jesus now leads his disciples up the slopes of the Mount of Olives, into the Garden of Gethsemane.

A garden and cave very familiar to Jesus and the disciples. Jesus doesn’t hide. Knowing Judas will need to know where to find him, he turns now in what little time he has left to anguished prayer and full surrender.

We have an extremely privileged perspective, looking in on Jesus’ vulnerability. Jesus is under extreme distress and anguish of soul.

In his dread, in his humanity, he is seeking a way out, if possible, to not drink the cup of the Father’s will for him.

We are looking in on Jesus’ intimacy with his Father and at the same time a very sobering insight into the cost of his mission, the cost of the cup of our salvation, and the cost of discipleship.

In these few verses, in facing extreme pressures in his humanness, we see how Jesus goes to a garden, with his friends, lamenting in anguish, all to surrender again to the Father’s will.

In the spring of 2020, I learned that my dad had been diagnosed with leukemia. He was 86 years old and his health had been declining. With this prognosis, I was no longer counting time left with my dad in years but in months.

And we were facing extreme pressures. I felt pressured on all sides.

We were trying to make decisions like should we even pursue chemo? And how was I going to find an assisted living apartment for him in Fargo, move him and get him to chemo 5 days a week? In less than 10 days?

And all during Covid. While working fulltime about 2 hours away. And I didn't have any other siblings or family to help me.

Needless to say, my prayers were filled with honest lamenting. I shared my frustrations, concerns, stress, and pleas to God for help. For God to make a way, to help me sleep at night and be able to work during the day, for hope, for healing, for my Dad to be open to God.

It is times like this, you also lean on your friends. I remember a couple of key conversations with two close friends. They coached me on finding a place for my dad that had "continuous care".

Finding a care facility that included assisted living apartments, that were attached to facilities for rehab and physical therapy, and then eventually nursing home facilities.

All in one place. Preparing for the whole inevitable timeline.

One thing gave me some calm in the midst of that storm, some sense of anchoring as the sea billows rolled. I knew my dad's wishes for the end of his life.

He did not want to prolong his life if his quality of life became poor. It gave me some small peace to know that what I was doing or going to do was what my father wanted. And it helped me surrender more fully to this difficult situation.

Though our specific situations may differ, we all have faced difficult situations like these.

Because we are united in our common humanity, common frailty, and limitations. Situations in life that are beyond our control. But we still wish it would go a certain way.

Painful situations that lead us to cling to our friends, and cry out our frustrations and hurt in lamentation. To hopefully reach that hard fought place of surrender.

I believe it is a profound and sacred privilege to engage with this particular text together. Let's take a more prolonged, careful, and studied look at this pivotal moment in Jesus' life that benefits us all.

First, let's notice together the location of this night in Jesus' life. I find a certain poignancy in it, maybe you will too.

The prophet Zechariah prophesized that on the Mount of Olives God's final king would stand.

Zechariah predicted the “day of the Lord”, one day the Lord would stand on the Mount of Olives, ready for battle, ready to be King over the whole earth.

Little did Zechariah know the future King would fight his greatest battle here, on his face, in great distress and sorrow of spirit, lamenting, **“Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”**

What stood out to me was the garden. It was an olive garden, at one time a working olive garden, full of olive trees and olives harvested in the right season.

Archeologists have found evidence of an olive press there, machinery that applied great pressure, forcing the olives to release their precious oils.

Oils pressed out to bless others. Oils sold so the farmer could live.

This is the spot Jesus picked to pray to his Father. Where the pressures of cosmic events, all of God’s work throughout time, through all the patriarchs and all prophets, all the predictions of the Messiah’s coming true...all these events are now all telescoping down, all down on one human back.

The weight of all these events are pressing, pressing, forcing this one man to release his will, surrender to the crushing weight of his Father’s will.

And in the process we see the precious pure oil of Jesus’ heart poured out...his faithful commitment to his Father.

Jesus’ willingness to surrender into the Father’s hands, so that his precious life poured out might be a blessing to others, that we might be forgiven and live.

I think the location for this night is telling and heartbreaking.

Also noteworthy, is how Jesus reached out to his friends in his distress. Revealing to us his full humanity. Leaving the rest of his disciples behind, Jesus asked Peter, James and John, his closest friends, to follow him deeper into the garden.

He wanted them to keep watch and pray. Watch perhaps for Judas’ return? Or pray to personally remain vigilant in their devotion to the Father?

To pray they would overcome the ever-present temptation to do less than all the Father was asking; especially now when the ask was so great.

But they couldn’t do it. His closest friends failed him. Full bellies, heavy eye lids, a busy Passover all week, it was nighttime.

They surrendered to the flesh and fell asleep on him three times. Can you hear Jesus’ anguished lament as he questions them, **“Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?”**

And maybe we too have experienced what Jesus did in our own difficulties. We too have been disappointed by the inability or unwillingness of even our closest friends and family to support us, in the way we wanted them to.

What could we take away from this point? As we support others in their deep difficulties? What would it mean for us to stay awake and watch? To be present, to listen, to pray and watch for God to strengthen, comfort and guide our loved ones.

We have layers of lament here. Jesus laments their inability to stay awake with him, as we noted.

Jesus also laments and seeks a way out from the trials he will face. Three different times Jesus drew near to God, imploring, **“if it is possible”**. Save me from this, Father. If it is allowable, if you could change this, Abba, please change it!

Jesus struggles to let go and give it to God.

It is a battle, a real battle to surrender ourselves, to not be in control. It's difficult to relinquish our wills and find true rest in surrendering ourselves to the ever-present mystery of God.

Especially at this high a price.

It's not easy choosing God's will as the best place to be. The best place to fall face down and become unraveled in all our limited humanity, in all humility, and in all powerlessness.

And yet, Jesus prayed, **“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”**

Three times he prayed but this cup was not taken away.

As we conclude, Jesus shows us yet one more step in following the Father. Demonstrating a brave and faith filled surrender.

In essence, Jesus grabs the cup of the Father's will, and drinks the cup he was trying to avoid, to the dregs. All of it!

For the love of his Father. And for his love of us.

He now embraced a deeper urgency and orientation of the spirit.

We watch Jesus asks his weary friends, **“Are you still sleeping?”**

And then he adds, **“Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go!”**

“Rise! Let us go!”

For us to see this!

This strength of Jesus' spirit to say a full and complete yes. To choose the Father's will and to also choose to face it head on, standing on his feet, moving toward the Father's will, meeting it and embracing it fully as it came his way.

That is a robust, fully mature kind of surrender to the Father's will.

One I imagine we are even now being challenged by. Jesus has set the bar high for our own discipleship, for our own following of God.

Recently I heard again, "**Life is hard, choose your hard.**" Yes, we will all face hardships moving forward in our lives, it is part of living on this earth.

But there is also a kind of hard that is infused with purpose, meaning, and life. The kind of hard, in which we choose to follow the Father's will no matter what, to love like Christ did.

What if that was the kind of people we could become more and more? To be people who move towards our future together, move towards God's will for us together, embracing it fully as a church.

Individually my soul shudders at the thought of trying to be brave, but if we did it together? If we resolved together, pool together our courage, to be a people who pray, "**Yet not my will but what You will, Abba God.**"

Imagine...what would our life look like here, if we were to pull together to do that?

As we take a few moments now to reflect on Lent and our invitation to lament.

After the service, don't forget our opportunity to go to the Cross. It is another place to interact with God. Write down, "Abba" or "help me do Your will", or name a sin, and tape it up, "nail" it on the cross.

Give it to God...ask for help to surrender to God's will for your life, help you to be emotionally honest with God.

Now as we reflect... Like Jesus, do you need a place in nature to enable you to lament and pray to God?

Do you have a friend who is going through a storm, can you keep watch with them in prayer? Is there some aspect of God's will for your life you are struggling to surrender to?

Take that to God in prayer.