

Midweek Lenten Service

March 7, 2012

Mark 14:32-42

“A Savior Who Serves: Submission”

Tonight our Lenten journey takes us into a walled garden on the lower western slopes of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem. Here, amidst a grove of olive trees where there was a press to process the olives into olive oil, Jesus frequently met with his disciples (John 18:2). It is here in a place called Gethsemane, following the celebration of the Passover meal in the city, that Jesus gathered his disciples around him one last time. He himself knows what is before him, but his disciples do not. He tells them that they will all fall away, something that Peter emphatically denies, as do all the other disciples. They even promise that they will die with Jesus, if need be. They are well-intentioned, but naïve about what is at stake here. They do not understand that the battle is not against **“flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”** (Ephesians 6:12). Despite their insistence that they will never abandon Jesus, he promises that he will never abandon them. He assures them that after he is raised up from the dead they will be reunited once again in Galilee. All of this is preparatory to the battle of the will that is about to take place there in the quiet of the Garden of Gethsemane. Tonight we focus on a Savior who serves through submission of his own will to that of the heavenly Father. May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

Everything is coming to a head, and all hell is about to break loose – literally. In his human nature as true man, Jesus who is true God and true man, confesses the terrible truth of what he is feeling: **“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death”** (Mark 14:34). The Scripture tells us that he **“began to be greatly distressed and troubled”** (Mark 14:33). In our own human nature, isn’t that how it is with us when we must face something that is deeply troubling but unavoidable? We, too, are greatly distressed and sorrowful. We can’t sleep; we can’t eat. We are consumed by the weight of what is before us until it is resolved. On some very small, miniscule level such experiences give us insight into the crushing burden that the Lord Jesus was experiencing there in the quiet of that garden. Can we even begin to imagine what this must have been like for him? Artists have sought to depict this agony in Gethsemane, but ultimately we will never know all that Jesus endured for us.

In his book, *Why Pray?*, John DeVries writes: “Most significant of all is the fact that Christ began the final phase of His atoning work on His knees, in prayer, in the garden. This was no easy effort, and we should never think of prayer as easy. A case can be made for the observation that much of the agony of bearing our sins was suffered by our Lord not so much on the cross or in the trial, as when He sweat drops like blood [see Luke 22:44], bringing His human nature into the perfect will of the Father. It was in those moments of strengthening His profound “enfolding” with the Father and the “indwelling” of the Spirit that the true battle over the Devil was won, for Jesus was able with serene calmness (rest) to stand before Pilate and to pray for the forgiveness of those who nailed Him to the cross” (*Why Pray?*, pp. 94-95). Could it be that without Gethsemane there would be no Golgotha? In the frailty of his human nature, Jesus prays to the Father: **“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me.**

Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36). Jesus here submits his will – his very life – to the Father, and in submitting himself thus, the Savior who serves has already won the battle. The betrayal, the mock trial, the ridicule and hatred, the scourging and torture of crucifixion – all these were willingly endured because Christ first submitted himself and his will to the Father.

And what of the disciples who claimed they would even die rather than fall away? They can’t even stay awake and keep watch with Jesus in the midst of his struggle in the garden. The words of Jesus will soon find their fulfillment as they all turn tail and run. There is an awful lot of us in the disciples. We too make bold claims for Jesus, but fall short on the delivery and follow-through. We, too, turn tail and run when the going gets tough. And how we struggle with that Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Do we really mean what we are praying here? In submitting his will to the Father’s plan and purpose, Jesus gave up his life. It is exactly in the giving up of his will and his life that Jesus did for us what we cannot do because of our sin. This side of heaven, our own will simply will never conform or fully submit to the Father’s will. But thanks be to God for Jesus’ willing submission of himself to the Father! He is our refuge, our hope, and our strength. Our sin and imperfection are forgiven and made whole in Jesus. The giving up – the submission – of his will in Gethsemane will lead Jesus to the giving up – the surrendering – of his life on the cross at Golgotha. Thanks be to God for this Savior who serves! Amen.