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Holy Land Pilgrimage 2020

***Where is Our Garden of Gethsemane?***

Matthew 26:36-46

Jesus and his disciples had just finished their Thanksgiving dinner! As one of my New Testament teachers described, it was a relaxing, happy time and a time of honesty. During this meal with his disciples, Jesus shared what was going to happen to him: one of his own was going to betray him. It was at this meal that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper.

Jesus knew what was going to happen in the next few hours, and being a person of prayer, he decided to go to the Garden of Gethsemane to be alone. As New Testament scholars say, Jesus had been to this place several times. It was a familiar place to his disciples as well.

Friends, nearly two thousand years ago, it happened – right in this vicinity! Guides and scholars estimate it happened at the Rock that we saw in the Church of All Nations. As guides point out, some of the olive trees here go back to the time of Jesus. Friends – it is the Garden of Gethsemane.

On that night as they entered the garden, Jesus told his disciples, "Stay here while I go and pray over there. When he took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, he began to feel sad and anxious." (Matthew 26:36).

As J. Gerald Harris writes, "Now, we know that Jesus took three disciples with Him into the garden. These three men were to constitute his support group. This is the third time he had shared a special occasion with these three men. The first occasion was when Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead. The second occasion was when Jesus went up to another mountain and was transfigured and 'the fashion of countenance was altered.'" (taken from J. Gerald Harris, Pastor Life, *Victory at the Cross*)

While he was there in the Garden of Gethsemane with Peter, James, and John, Christ said to them, "I'm very sad. It's as if I'm dying. Stay here and keep alert with me. Then he went a short distance farther and fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it's possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.'" (Matthew 26: 38-39)

Friends, even in the midst of Jesus' struggle with deep pain and sorrow, he practiced what he preached. Remember, in the Sermon on the Mount, teaching the Lord's Prayer, he had said, "Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven." (Matthew 6:10). Jesus echoed the substance of that prayer when he prayed, "However-not what I want but what you want." (Matthew 26:39).

As the evening continued, Jesus noticed his disciples were sleeping. Yes, even his trusted inner circle was sleeping, despite the plea from Jesus to stay awake and pray. Friends, our time here is limited. May I request that we make time to prayerfully read the rest of the Scripture and meditate upon it so as not to miss what happened that night.

Friends, what is the relevance of this Scriptural passage to you and me? Though one might preach a long sermon on this, in the interest of time, let me share just a few reflections with you.

Do we have a Gethsemane to go to for our own time of prayer and reflection? As we look at the ministry of the saints of the church such as John and Charles Wesley, Mother Teresa, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and others, we see that they were people of strong prayer.

In my own journey, I can say that I have made it thus far only by the grace of God and my dependence on prayer. We all need places like the Garden of Gethsemane, a place where we can go free from cell phones, WhatsApp messages, and other interruptions in order to find a place to be in communion with our Creator God.

Clergy and laity alike, do we communicate with God on a regular basis?

Second, in our journey as baptized Christians, as pastors, or even as professionals, do we have people in our inner circles to whom we can go to share ideas and hold ourselves accountable? Yes, even today in times of concerns and anxieties, in these difficult and challenging days, I pick up the phone and call on a couple of trusted people. Clergy, I beg you not to be lone rangers in your ministry! Name an inner circle! I will never forget, when Bishop Violet Fisher became my Bishop, she asked *me* for a piece of wisdom! I was driving, she was on the passenger side. I looked at her and said, "Bishop, you are the Bishop!" She said something like, "You know, Brother Suda, I need an inner circle to bounce around ideas and seek wisdom." Remember, even Jesus had an inner circle. We need that. All of us need that. Think about it!

Third, do we *say* prayers, or do we *act out* prayers? Like Jesus, do we submit ourselves to the will of God? In the Lord's Prayer, don't we say, "However-not what I want but what you want?" (Matthew 26:39) Friends, what bothers me is we often tell God what we need and use prayer as a gimmick! But Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, challenged you and me not only to say the Lord's Prayer but to act it! Let me be honest with you. I have prayed to God for things, sometimes for months and years, but I did not get *my* prayer. Often, I would later I say to myself, "Ah, now I know why I did not get my prayer answered then. I see God knew what was best for me."

Fourth, when we need to be in prayer, do we sleep? The best theologically trained disciples were struggling to keep awake when they needed to be in prayer. Sisters and Brothers in Christ, when all kinds of crazy things are going on in the world, when injustices are happening around us, do we simply say, "I cannot do anything about it," and shrug our shoulders? Silence often encourages and perpetuates more harm. Church: are we awake as disciples of Jesus Christ? Are we spiritually awake to what is happening around us...or are we sleeping? Where is our Gethsemane? We must find it and go there as often as possible.