

Sunday March 8, 2020  
Lesson 2: Jesus in Gethsemane  
Scripture: Matthew 26: 36-46

**Context:**

We continue our section on the wilderness as we go to the Garden of Gethsemane. The Garden of Gethsemane is not typically thought of as the wilderness with its proximity to the city of Jerusalem. However, the gospel lesson reveals how the garden was a part of Jesus' wilderness journey.

The lesson comes from the Gospel of Matthew, and recounts the moments before Jesus and his arrest. Following the last supper, Jesus takes the disciples to Gethsemane to pray. Going a little further, he takes a few of his most trusted disciples even further into the garden and reveals to them he is sad and anxious. He asks Peter, James, and John to stay awake with him as he prays.

As Jesus goes off to pray a little further away in his anxious state, he returns to see if the disciples have stayed awake. Three different times he returns to discover they are asleep again and again. The third time he wakes them up, he reveals his time is near. The disciples have missed the last bit of quality time they were to possess with Jesus.

The narrative reminds us of how we understand Jesus and his identity. Specifically the Gethsemane story reminds us Jesus was a genuine human being.<sup>1</sup> As Nicene Christians, we believe Jesus was both human and divine, not emphasizing one over the other. In this text, Jesus appears as a normal human being, capable of fear and anxiety.<sup>2</sup> He knows what awaits him and he feels all the visceral human emotions.

There are several facts to underscore the humanity of Jesus. Firstly, Jesus falls to his ground to contemplate his face, not like a Stoic philosopher.<sup>3</sup> Second, he expresses resentment of his closest followers proving to be incapable of agonizing with him in his darkest hour.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is not afraid to show emotion, nor is he afraid to express his feelings. He rebukes his disciples and he pleads to God to the Father about God's will being done.

The Gethsemane narrative emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. In doing so, Christians are given a model to follow. The text emphasizes Jesus' most important sacrifice was not his blood but his obedience.<sup>5</sup> The Garden of Gethsemane becomes a foil to the Garden of Eden.<sup>6</sup> Christians have a model for how to respond to pain.

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<sup>1</sup> Hare, Douglas R.A. "Matthew," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 2010), 300.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

### **Application:**

People who are stereotypically strong and stoic might find this part of Jesus' story a little unnerving. The Son of God, the Lord and Savior of the world, is anxious, tense, and emotional. There are plenty of places in scripture where Jesus has appeared more calm and collected, the "non-anxious presence" in the midst of turmoil.

Yet the very power of the Garden of Gethsemane passage is the vulnerability of Jesus. Here Jesus does not hide behind the "I am" statements in John or the lofty "suffering servant" images in Mark. In Matthew's gospel account of Jesus in the garden, Jesus is vulnerable, anxious, and is sweating at the fact that his life is coming to an end. To make it worse, the very people he trusts to be beside him, abandon him in the course of the evening. Despite the fact that he has warned them time and time again about what will happen to him, they cannot even stay awake long enough to get those last few moments with him.

Jesus experiences the human emotions we all feel, even if we would never admit to feeling them. He feels the cold realization of death and how not even he will be spared. He feels the sharp sting of rejection as he realizes his disciples have abandoned him and not even care about what is about to happen. He feels that sinking gut feeling of knowing something bad is going to happen and there is nothing he can do to stop the timeline of events.

Even the most resilient of us will have to admit that at some point in our lives we have experienced our own Gethsemane stories. There are moments where we have pleaded with God and moments where people we genuinely loved betrayed us with a kiss. And there are moments when we realize that no one is immune to human suffering including us. We are faced with our humanity and it can be some of the most painful experiences of our lives.

Yet perhaps this is where the Garden of Gethsemane can draw us closer to our Lord. Our Lord knew about pain and suffering. He knew that life is not always full of rainbows and puppies. Sometimes you will face things that you dread. There will be friends who disappoint, abandon, or betray you. Even if you are one of the most resilient people, you will face your limits and question where is God in the midst of your pain and struggling.

To be human is to feel pain. None of us are immune from it and we never read of any scriptures telling us that being a Christian will carry with it some talisman for life. The question is often what will we do when pain comes to our way.

Our Lord in the garden shows us that it is okay to be real. We are allowed to feel our pain and express it. We are allowed to be sad, to lament, and even to be angry. While we may prefer to have our stiff upper lip, there are times we have to be honest with ourselves and allow for the feelings to pulse through our body.

We know that Jesus did not reject his arrest. He accepted the kiss from Judas and went with those who came to rest with him. It was as if he allowed the Garden of Gethsemane to be the place where he allowed himself to have all the feelings and processing he needed to do.

Perhaps the most tangible thing for us to do as we reflect upon this lesson is to consider where our Garden of Gethsemanes are located. Is it the place outside where nobody knows but us? Maybe it's the confines of our home offices or the back porch.

Perhaps for us, the garden may even be the safe people in our lives who allow us take off our masks and be utterly naked and transparent in how we feel.

It is healthy for us to feel pain. It is healthy for us to grieve. It is healthy for us to get angry and feel sadness. Just as our Lord felt all the things in the Garden of Gethsemane, we too are allowed to feel our pain and suffering.

Have you ever felt fearful for your life? How do you respond to feelings of anger, sadness, and frustration? Have you ever felt betrayed by someone you loved? Where is your go to for your Garden of Gethsemane? Are there people who act as conduits for you to process everything you feel? How can you draw closer to our Lord in your suffering?

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