

Mark 14:32-42  
The Final 24 Hours of Jesus: Agony in the Garden  
March 4, 2012

The weather is tempting us to think Spring is here to stay. I was walking Sandy out in the yard on Tuesday and saw some bees out working the flowers that are beginning to bloom. So I would imagine that some of you are getting geared up to get outside planting your flowers and vegetables. You probably getting excited to get back to your gardens.

In the scripture we are about to hear Jesus has returned to a garden, the Garden of Gethsemane. He has left the upper room where our focus was last Sunday when we learned how he washed his disciples feet to remind them that his followers serve, and he used the bread and cup of wine as symbols for the sacrifice of his body and blood. And now a little more sand has passed through the hour glass for the time he has remaining to live upon this earth. He returns to this garden in great distress.

**Scripture Reading Mark 14:32-42**

A passage of scripture like this has a great deal of potential. It invites us to see what Jesus endured for our sakes and to help us know when we are in the Garden of Gethsemane and what we must do. Maybe you already can name times of your life that have been your time in **his** garden?

News broke this week of another shooting at a high school in Ohio. First we heard one student died. Then the next day another, and a few hours after that a third young life was lost. I immediately thought how that community and those families are in the garden like Jesus once was in great distress and anguish. People in neighboring states this week have lost loved ones homes, and communities to the outbreak of tornadoes - and they too are

spending time in his garden.

The gospel of Luke describes this moment as a moment of Jesus being in great agony. Many refer this as Christ's hour of agony. It was a bit of a surprise to me to learn though that the origin of the word "agony" doesn't quite come from the meaning one would think such a heavy, serious and even dark word conjures up. Vine's New Testament Dictionary states that the word agony comes from a Greek word that means a place to assemble or a place to assemble to have contest or games. p.43 So the original meaning of the word agony means to assemble at a place for a contest, most likely a sporting contest.

So what was the contest Jesus was facing? Maybe it is similar to what we face every day? Everyday we live we cannot escape the contest between choosing right or wrong, good or evil, truth or deception, generosity or greed, fairness or inequality, surrender to God or control life on our terms, courage or fear, trust or hopelessness. We might think those are no-brainer issues, but when the stakes are higher, and the fallout from our decisions in these contests will have a ripple effect, we experience distress, agitation and agony about what to do.

We feel the anguish when a decision we have made, may be right; but unpopular and its similar to being in his garden.

A refusal to support someone may cause friends to criticize you or betray you.

Honesty may cost you relationships, advancement on your job or financial profit and when it does it is similar to spending time in his garden.

Pastor Andy Stanley once said, **"Character is the will to do what is right defined by God, regardless of personal cost."** (Louder

**Than Word, p.31)** I heard a survivor of this week's tornado say on the news that in their basement as the tornado hit they just felt extreme pressure on their bodies. Jesus was feeling the pressure of doing the right thing that would cost him suffering and life. It's not a walk in the park to always do what is right defined by God when it will personally cost us in some way.

### **No Need of Guilt**

I hope one thing we hear is that Jesus was in agony. Jesus, the one that was with God in the beginning when the universe was being born was hurting deeply. Luke's gospel said that in this moment he sweated great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). Literally understood or symbolically taken we get the point don't we?

**Agony can be the normal outcome of courageously doing God's will.** Sometimes as Christians we may feel guilty because we have faced threatening situations with fear, tears, and questioning. No need to feel guilty - look at Jesus. The final 24 hours doesn't have him once again grabbing a whip and calling people on the carpet like he had previously done earlier in his ministry when he cleansed the temple for its misuse. He was feeling the heavy, heavy burden and pressure of life.

### **No Need to Believe God has Failed**

His story is good to remember if we think God has let us down because we are going through times of agony. I have had those moments as well. The Bible is a Who's Who of people who lived through times of questioning whether God had forsaken them. They wrestled to find where in the world God could possibly be in the darkest moment life was dishing out. If the word agony means a place to hold a contest a game, they were wondering why God was letting them loose the match. In verse 35 Jesus questioned "if this hour might pass from him." We may question too; but his story in the garden reminds us great moments of agony do not mean God has failed.

His hour in the garden is the reminder of all reminders in the scripture that to experience the pain of life does not mean the absence of God. God is still the one who brought all of creation into being. The Psalmist once referred to God as his father who owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10) but we will have our share of time being in the Garden of Gethsemane; but that does not mean God has abandoned us. The final hours of the life Jesus teaches us that even though it feels that way; it is not that way.

### **No Need to Believe We are Being Punished**

His time of anguish can comfort those who think they have found themselves in the contest of agony because they have done something wrong or they are not spiritual enough. Well sometimes yes we may be feeling the extreme weight of our sin. But to have that hour, that moment of agony does not necessarily mean we have brought it upon ourselves. We cannot get any more spiritual than Jesus, and he went through times of great distress. We all face our time in the Garden of Gethsemane. If you haven't, live long enough and you will.

### **Jesus Taught us How to Cope with Our Gardens**

The agony he endured is not the only lesson from this story but we can find meaning in how he confronted that moment of his life. Jesus faced his hour of anguish with prayer, deep heart felt conversation with God, and listening for God's guidance. Prayer is like perhaps what we used this past week to hold or anchor down the things we didn't want the wind to blow away. Prayer keeps the storms of life from driving us away from God when it's our time to be in the garden.

### **Be Persistent in Prayer v.41**

A minister by the name of Steve Furick wrote recently, (2/22/12) that there are two things that the Devil will tell us to tempt us and cause us to give into his leadership. When things are going bad,

the Devil tells us things will never get better. When the life is going good, the Devil will tell us it won't last. Either line of thought can hook us into stupidity, rash moves and decisions unless we're like Jesus and we're persistent in prayer to God. Three times the Bible tells us Jesus went to pray as well as asked his disciples to pray. So when our moment of agony comes we have a choice, we can either think why bother to look to God, or we can be persistent in prayer.

### **Trust God is All Powerful = Omniscient v. 36**

Jesus not only was persistent in prayer but he believed God was still greater than the threat he faced. I believe this because Jesus prayed "Father with you all things are possible." v.36 That is what was said to Sarah and Abraham when informed they would have a baby in old age that "with God all things are possible." It is what the angel told Mary of how a virgin could conceive, that with God all things are possible." Jesus confesses in his prayer what others had to be reminded of that with God all things are possible. He knew it was in the realm of God's ability to deliver him. He trusted somehow God was greater than the situation. So Jesus coped with the darkest moment of his life still trusting that no matter what happened, God was greater than the events unfolding. I can handle my garden of Gethsemane moments, when I trust that somehow even though the moment doesn't look bright; God's greater will shall be accomplished.

### **Trust in Your Spiritual Identity v.36**

One thing Jesus never lost sight was to know to whom he belonged. He prayed such an affectionate intimate way to God unlike others religious sages and teachers dared to pray. He addressed God by praying, "Pappa." Do you remember those moments when our parents wouldn't give us what we wanted and perhaps we would doubt their love and care for us. We would might have discounted they knew what they were talking about, they weren't looking out for our best interest. Jesus didn't doubt

he was God's son, nothing could separate him from his Father. Jerrell Thornton is going to come and share with us a word and a song that can help us to remember such a truth.

“You'll Always Be My Child.”

You can get through your garden when you trust that even though things did not work out liked you dreamed, you are still God's child. The guards still came to arrest Jesus. Judas still betrayed him. But he walked out of that garden knowing whatever he faced he belonged to God. Our prayers won't always change our outward circumstances but God can use our prayers to change us internally, renewed in knowing we belong to God, no matter what the contest of life we face.