

"The Uncertainty of Obedience"
Matthew 26:36-46

Our Lenten Theme: **Embracing the Uncertain** certainly fits our scripture for today. From the certainty of Palm Sunday proclaiming Jesus as the Long Awaited Messiah, the Son of God, the King of kings...in just 4 days...certainty has drifted to uncertainty. The people who with certainty waved their Palm branches on Sunday, symbols of victory, and shouted "**Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!**" soon on Friday they will wave their fists and scream "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!

Knowing He will be arrested, mocked, tortured and crucified the next day, on Thursday evening Jesus took His Disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. Nothing unusual about Jesus and His Disciples going to the Garden of Gethsemane at the Mt. of Olives, in the Kidron Valley just outside the gates of Jerusalem. They had been there many times. Nothing unusual about Jesus withdrawing to pray...and nothing unusual about taking the inner circle of Peter, James and John with Him. Yet this time, it is different. Jesus, who always knows the Will of God...this time...in this darkest hour...seems uncertain as He prays **My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me....**

As I sat by the bed of a man dying once, he said to me with a tear in his eye: "***I've never felt this way before. I feel like death is closing in on me.***" I imagine that's how Jesus felt. Christ many times before had told His Disciples calmly that He must go to Jerusalem and there He would be arrested, tortured and crucified. NOW "The Hour has Come." (Time is running out...Perhaps Jesus felt like "death was closing in on Him.")

At one time or another, life closes in on all of us. Something we hoped and prayed would never happen becomes a reality and it feels like life is closing in on us...we feel the pressure building...like a vice-grip or a pressure cooker. We've all been there. What do YOU do when this happens? When life closes in, what do You do? Fight OR Flight? Throw up your hands and quit? What do you do when everything seems to be closing in on you?

Jesus PRAYED. Jesus poured His heart out to God with deep sadness and distress, throwing Himself on the ground and prayed **My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.**

Maybe you too have prayed to God in your distress...and yet you questioned whether or not God could hear your prayers...feeling as if your prayers went no further than the ceiling. Uncertain...uncertain whether God heard you?

Reminds me of the story of the man who thought his wife was going deaf. He shared his concerns with his doctor. His doctor suggested that he test his wife's hearing before bringing her in for an appointment. So that evening, when his wife was preparing dinner, the man stood 15 feet behind her and said, *"What's for dinner, honey?"* No response. He moved to 10 feet behind her and asked again. No response. Then he stood 5 feet behind her and asked again, no response. Finally, he stood directly behind her and asked, *"Honey, what's for dinner?"* She turned around...looked directly at him and said, *"For the 4th time...I said CHICKEN!"*

God doesn't have a hearing problem...Sometimes WE DO! (and you thought it was God with the hearing problem) There may not be a more difficult moment in our faith journey than when we find ourselves unable to hear God's voice and discern God's will.

We've all been there, laboring over a decision, struggling with feeling alone, wondering if God really is out there and really listening. We begin to doubt God and ourselves, unsure about which of us has the hearing problem...for there seems to be a divine silence.

Wouldn't the life of faith be a whole lot easier...a whole lot more certain...less doubt if we could hear God's voice as certain as we can hear another person talking? Sure it would. But where's the faith in that?! Learning to listen to God can be difficult and bewildering especially in those times when we feel hopeless and alone. But even the act of learning to listen, of trying to listen, is itself a blessed practice that can make you a stronger Christian.

I don't know about you, but I take comfort that Jesus prayed this prayer...for it shows the fullness of Jesus' Humanity. Sure Jesus was fully Divine...but He was also fully Human, and as Christ felt the pressure...felt death closing in on Him...even Jesus felt uncertain.

Christ knew for certain what was going to happen...that He would be arrested, tortured, and crucified....what He was uncertain about was...**COULD THERE BE ANOTHER WAY?** "IF...IF it is possible...Let **THIS CUP** pass from me...is there another way? (Another way to save people from their sins? No, there's not another way)

Not another Way **BUT** there was another choice...**RUN**....get out of Jerusalem...save yourself. There was another choice. We all are faced with the same choice every day. The choice between comfort and obedience, between self-preservation and self-sacrifice...between human will and God's will...the choice between our way and God's Way.

Know this, when Jesus went to the Cross it wasn't that He didn't have a choice. He did. He chose God's Way. Jesus could have rejected the "CUP," He could have done what He wanted...and yet Jesus chose what God wanted..."not what I want but what you want."

Jesus prayed three times: **My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.** Christ prayed this three times not because He wasn't sure God heard Him, not because God didn't answer the first two times, not because He was giving God a chance to change His mind...no He prayed three times to move from uncertainty to certainty.

Someone once shared this wisdom with me, that when you pray think of a traffic light. When God answers the first time, it is **RED** for stop and discern God's will, then pray again, when God answers the second time, it is **YELLOW**, to proceed with caution as you look both ways. Pray a third time, when God answers the third time it is **GREEN**, for **GO**.

Jesus found the Disciples asleep three times, symbolic of the three times Peter would deny knowing Jesus. Yet Jesus prayed three times and all three times He knew God's answer was for Jesus to "drink of this cup" and after the third time...Jesus said to His Disciples..."**The Time is at Hand...Get up, let us be going.**"

Prayer sometimes means talking and listening to God even though you are not sure He is listening or speaking. Prayer means praying even when, especially when you are uncertain. Be certain of this: God hears and answers all prayers...we may not always like

the answer for sometimes He says "Yes," sometimes He says "No," sometimes He says "Wait," sometimes He says "I've got something even better for you." May we pray, like Jesus, "not my will but thine be done," being certain God's Way is always the right way.