

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**Palm/Passion Sunday (2022)**

**The Hour Has Come**

**Rev. Toby Byrd**

***“Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”” (Matthew 26:45–46, ESV)***

Our Lord’s last Passover meal is complete. He has given His disciples a new command, to love one another (John 13:34) and He has instituted the Holy Eucharist where each Lord’s Day we are invited to receive His true body and blood in, under, and with the bread and wine of Holy Communion for the forgiveness of our sins. Then, closing with a hymn, our Lord sets off in the moonlight with His disciples to cross the Kidron brook on their way to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. For it is there that our Lord seeks strength and support in prayer.

This is His last night with His disciples and as He walks to the Garden of Gethsemane, He cannot help but remember His life as a man and the influence His life has had on so many, especially those He called to be His apostles. Lowly, ordinary men, men who were sinners, considered outcasts by the religious class of their day, yet He calls them to be His apostles. Although these men had little influence on others before Him, they will have a tremendous influence on those whom they meet after His ascension to heaven. He is also remembering the numerous people He has helped, the demon possessed, the blind, the lame, the lepers, the woman at the well, the woman whose daughter was demon possessed, the widow of Cain, the centurion’s daughter, Lazarus, and so many others; including those to whom He gave new life through the gift of faith. His life is filled with helping others, and soon His life will be given in death to help all mankind, freeing them from the curse of sin, death, and the devil.

Yet, as He walks to the Garden of Gethsemane, His heart is heavy as He knows darkness will creep into the hearts of His followers. One will betray Him, another will deny Him, and they will all forsake Him. He knows that the cup from which He must drink is bitter to the last drop. He knows that the burden is heavy and the suffering that awaits Him will be excruciating. Upon entering the Garden He turns to His disciples and says, ***“Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” (Matthew 26:36, ESV)*** But He does not desire to be completely alone. Seeking both fellowship and companionship from His closest disciples, He takes Peter, John, and James with Him. Their nearness would be a source of comfort and He desire their prayers as well. Having neared the place where He desires to pray, He says to Peter, John, and James, ***“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”” (Matthew 26:38–39, ESV)*** This cup is the cup of suffering and death to which our Lord is destined. What should we make of this request by Jesus?

The passion is at the center of Jesus’ petition. Thus, He asks, is there another way? But He knows the entire purpose of His ministry, of the Gospel, is at stake in this petition. All the synoptic evangelists record this petition, but none offer an explanation or motive; however, it is clear, Jesus asks His Father to remove this suffering.

There is little doubt that Jesus has unswervingly followed His Father's will throughout His earthly life. Not only did He withstand the temptations of Satan, but He predicted the woe that is coming on Him this very night and yet did not run away. So for us to think that ***"if it be possible"*** expresses a real possibility, then we must cast such thoughts aside. To be sure, ***"if it be possible"*** does express a real desire, a profound wanting on the part of Jesus. He is asking, is there another way? But even while asking He knows what the Father's ***"will"*** is. Here is exposed the two natures in the one person of Christ. Here we see proof of what the writer to the Hebrews said about Jesus, ***"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."*** (Hebrews 2:17, ESV) He had to have a human nature that could become the final sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, He had to be capable of suffering and dying. His destiny was the way of the cross. So, we see the human nature asking is there another way, but we also see the Divine nature confess, there is no other way than the Father's will. Therefore, both natures of Christ carry out the Father's plan, willingly accepting the pain and suffering the Christ must endure. Before this mystery we can do nothing more than bow in awe and worship.

But isn't this the way we are? Our human natures naturally desire to avoid pain and suffering. Not just physical, but emotional. So, when we know we're going to face some trying ordeal, when it seems the burden we face is going to be too great, when we are filled with anxiety for ourselves or our loved ones, we do all we can to avoid the pain? Do not our hearts yearn for companionship and understanding? In the face of some difficult and painful surgery, do we not desire to seek another path? When a loved one faces the crisis of a serious illness, does it not seem as though minutes drag into hours, that the moans and cries of our loved one are a harbinger of an even greater grief. Remember then how you faced the pain and how much you appreciated the nearness of those who understood, who cared, and who prayed with you. Remember how good it made you feel to lean on the shoulder of a friend or a loved one, unleashing your pent-up emotions! How much easier it was for you because someone you trusted was near to help and comfort. But sadly that was not the case in the Garden of Gethsemane for Jesus.

The moonlight shimmered on the disciples, who although near, were nonetheless asleep. There was something deeply disappointing in our Lord's voice as He found them sleeping. He said to Peter, and thus the others, ***"So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*** (Matthew 26:40-41, ESV)

Why are you sleeping? What's wrong with you, do you not know this hour is an hour of crisis? Get up! Give yourselves over to prayer so that you may not be put to the test. Returning to His prayer, our Lord prays, ***"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."*** (Matthew 26:42, ESV) His human and Divine natures are fully in sync. Three times Jesus went off to pray, and three times He returns only to find His disciples sleeping. Each time He warns them of the impending trial of their faith, and yet, each time the disciples return to sleeping. Yes, they are possibly thinking, we know our Lord is anxious, but we're pretty sure this will all pass and tomorrow will be much the same as today. Oh, how foolish they were to seek their own wisdom.

This account of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane reveals our Savior in His last hours filled with the anticipation of the next days suffering. St. Matthew tells us that His, ***"soul is very sorrowful, even to death."*** His prayer was so intense that His ***"sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."*** (Luke 22:44, ESV) The moonlight shines now upon the Holy of Holies. We cannot begin to comprehend the agony of His soul or the intenseness of His

suffering. He is being wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. He is bearing the guilt of the world. He is being **“poured out like water, and all (His) bones are out of joint.”** His heart is **“like wax; it is melted within (His) breast;”** (Psalm 22:14) He feels the guilt and bears in Himself the punishment of all the sins of the world. He is suffering the consequences of sin for all. Here the moon falls upon a figure writhing in the dust of Gethsemane, tortured with pain and grief, spending itself. The sins of Adam and Eve, Cain and Amnon, Absalom and David, Ahab and Jezebel, Saul, Israel’s first king, and of Saul of Tarsus, of priest and Levite, of Pharisee and Sadducee, of Judas and Peter, of Jew and Gentile, all, all of these are the monstrous mountain of sin that had been heaped upon Him, and will continue to be heaped upon Him by the children of men till the end of time; all, all of this weighing Him down; all, all of this causing Him to be greatly troubled. This is what caused Him to grovel in the dust making Him **“a worm, and not a man”** (Psalm 22:6, ESV) The full wrath of God on account of men’s sins sought Him out as a target. As man’s Substitute, yours, and mine, He suffered the curse of sin. Not one of us can understand the horror and the terror that gripped His soul, nor the deep sorrow that brought forth the drops of blood that fell to the ground.

He trembles, He shudders, He sweats blood. But He also prays. There in the moonlight He lifts His heart to the Father. Even though His disciples are weary of sleep. His Father will not fail Him. Yes, He prayed, **“let this cup pass from me.”** The question lingers, “Would His Father hear Him and withdraw the cup?” Is there some other way by which the sins of the world could be atoned for? Would the Father’s justice relent? No, not His will but the Father’s will be done. He came into the world for this very purpose, to atone for the sins of all men. He knows He must drink. A mere sip will not do. He must drink of it all. It is necessary for the salvation of the world.

You may have a heavy cross to bear. It may be the disappointment of loved ones or some physical or mental disability. If so, do as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane, go to the Father and say: “Not my will, but Yours be done.” No matter what the future may hold, no matter what the dread lies ahead, no matter the uncertainty tomorrow brings regarding today’s trial, pray as Jesus prayed. Let your will be that of the Father’s and all will be well. His presence will cheer you and inspire you. Just as He heard our Lord’s prayer in the Garden, He’ll not fail to hear your prayer.

St. Luke tells us **“There appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.”** (Luke 22:43, ESV)

Unlike the Angel of that first Passover this one comes not to slay; nor to destroy, but to strengthen. This was the Father’s answer to His Son’s prayer. Think of what our Lord must have endured to require the comfort of an angel. Like His time in the wilderness for forty days, this angel comes to comfort and nourish our Lord with the fulfillment of God’s plan that opens heavens door to all men. As we walk in the gardens of our burdens, we are strengthened and cheered knowing that heavens own ministers are sent to do the Father’s will. How it inspires us to realize the price Jesus paid for the forgiveness of our sins. It was on account of your guilt that our Lord was so troubled. It was because you and I could do nothing to save ourselves that He not only prayed but actually lived the words: “Father, not My will, but Yours be done.” As you see Him crushed with anguish, stricken, smitten, and afflicted, and bowed down with grief are you willing to stay awake and pray? This is your challenge as you stand as spectators in the shadow. You hear Him pleading with you to be faithful to the end, that you may stand the test of faith. He reminds us that, **“the spirit. . . is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** How many times in your life have you found that to be true? When this truth jumps up and looks you in the face, then I would encourage you to walk once more into the Garden with Jesus. To stand there in the moonlight to see the flight of the angel, to gaze upon the Holy of Holies, and say, “O God, I

never truly realized how much my Savior suffered for me. I never realized the price for my atonement was so steep. I did not realize that the wrath of God was so great because of my sin. Forgive me Father for the sake of Your Son, Jesus. Pour out Your grace and mercy upon me. Strengthen me with a steadfast faith and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, that I may watch and pray all my days that I may do Your will and lead others to see what I have seen in the Garden of Gethsemane.”

On this night the world witnessed the greatest task and suffering it has ever known compressed into that hour in the Garden of Gethsemane. Yes, *Our Lord's hour had come*, it had come for the liberty and salvation of the world. Oh, Holy Father, let me always confess, “not my will, but Yours be done.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.