

## In the Garden – sermon on Mark 14: 32-32

Sisters and brothers,  
when you look at the last reading, the passage in which Jesus prays in Gethsemane, Mark 14 verses 32 to 42, what is it that strikes you most? Which word, which sentence, which verse is it that has the strongest impact on you? What could it be that would make you want to dig a bit deeper into the text?

A small group of Peace Church members met to study this text on Thursday evening ten days ago. And after having read it once that was the question we asked ourselves. What strikes us most?

And the answers were as many and as diverse as we were people in the room. After we'd all mentioned our parts or passages we'd almost covered the whole story. According to the Bible study method we are using on those Thursday evenings people are not supposed to share the reasons for their choices, but simply point out what they have chosen. This first round of sharing was almost a repetition of the story.

Our choices were:

**35 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.**

**36 He said, «Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.»**

**37b Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?**

**38 Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.»**

**41b Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?**

That was it. Here we were...

And then we were asked to read the text again, - which I am not doing now.

After the second time of reading it, the question the group meditated was “what is God telling me personally for my own life with this text?”

And while we were still sharing our responses, it dawned on us what power there is in these simple ten verses of Scripture... what power there is to speak to us just through the plain text – nothing more and nothing less.

Jesus and his disciples went to Gethsemane, the garden outside Jerusalem. And to his disciples (in the end 8 of them) Jesus said: Sit here while I pray.

Those 8 were not even asked to pray or stay awake, but simply to sit – while he prayed.

And for his actual prayer he took along 3 of them.

Three he trusted most?

Liked most?

Needed most?

Maybe the three he thought would understand him best...

In the presence of those three his true feelings were overwhelming him. “He began to be distressed and agitated...” and he told them: “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” He shared his feelings with them, told them what to do, and asked them a favour.

Remain here, meant, he needed to be alone. Yes.

But not totally alone. What he'd asked them for was their being awake and thinking of him.

He needed their presence and their vigilance near by. He needed to know that they were with him... He wanted to be kept in their thoughts and prayers...

Jesus himself went a short distance away and threw himself to the ground.

Nothing could stop him from doing that. He prayed his famous last attempt to get away without all the suffering.

**Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.**

You should think that especially with the last sentence of this prayer Jesus may have come to – at least some – peace with this whole disastrous situation. “Not what I want, but what you want...”

But then he came and found them sleeping... those three who he had asked to stay – and to stay awake. Those three had fallen asleep.

We don't know why, but do note that Jesus was then only speaking to one of them: “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?”

I don't know what you feel, when you hear this? I can hear the most disappointed and tired voice saying ...are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?

Knowing the context of the story, this sentence can break your heart.

Gone was the small peace Jesus may have found in praying with his father.

Gone was placing it all in God's hand and leaving it all with him.

Here in this moment we are witnessing one of the greatest disappointments in God's story with his people.

And it happens not only once...

After Jesus had given his friends some good advice...

**Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,** he went away again.

He knew what it means to be human. He did not blame or complain that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. He spoke it as a simple statement.

And then he prayed again.

The Bible tells us that he prayed the same words again. So that is: **Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me...**

He seemed to need this again. And again he closed with the powerful handing over “**yet not what I want, but what you want.**”

And believe it or not. When he came back from this second time of solitude and prayer, he found his friends sleeping again. This time the text gives us a reason: **for their eyes were very heavy;** and a reaction of those who'd disappointed him and let him down. “**They did not know what to say to him**”. Full stop.

Well, - what would we have said?

We all know this: standing there, head bent down, nothing to say but all these feelings of embarrassment, shame and guilt.

What can one say?

I suppose one could say: sorry.

Forgive me.  
 Maybe only this.  
 Maybe anything else would just make the whole situation worse...  
 ...if we started to try to explain and give weak or false excuses.  
 What can one say?

The disciples said nothing. And Jesus obviously went away to pray again.  
 The text here doesn't tell us, how and that he went.  
 The text – which is even harsher, isn't it – only tells us that Jesus came back a third time – no mention of what he prayed – and said to them “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?”  
 And we don't know, were they still sleeping or not? Had they fallen asleep a third time? Or was Jesus just so disappointed and even angry that he suggested they'd fallen asleep again?  
 However, he did not allow them to respond or explain. He continued speaking, saying. “Enough! The hour has come; the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”  
 They had missed the last chance of togetherness, of prayer, of peace and reconciliation, because there was no time left. They had to set off and meet the crowd that turned the garden into a battle field.

Let me read to you the passage again, and add 2 more verses.

Mark 14: 32-44

**“32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, «Sit here while I pray.»**  
**33 He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated.**  
**34 And he said to them, «I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.»**  
**35 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.**  
**36 He said, «Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.»**  
**37 He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, «Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?**  
**38 Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.»**  
**39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.**  
**40 And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him.**  
**41 He came a third time and said to them, «Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.**  
**42 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.»**  
**43 Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.**  
**44 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, «The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away...»**  
 ...and what came then, we all know.  
 There was no way back.

What we learn from this passage is that sometimes God is asking us to do only a very simple thing – and yet we fail.

Sit, pray, stay awake... And we don't manage.

The surprise in all that is that God does not abandon us because of our failures. God knows, we are human. God knows we want to give our best (the spirit is willing), but don't always get it right (but the flesh is weak). God does not blame us for that but offers chances to try again. He sees us failing again – and again, and still continues his journey with us – his journey with his people. In Jesus' case this was the road into Jerusalem and unto the cross.

What we also learn from this passage is that there is always a chance for prayer. Even in the most frightening and desperate situation, when life feels at its worst, and we are grieved to death, when we don't see a way in or out, we can pray. We can fall down on our knees, let go of control and hand the whole mess over to God.

**Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want**

In the shadows of Gethsemane's trees we find a place of broken promises.

In the end they all had left Jesus and fled. These people are the same ones who just hours before had been fighting amongst themselves over which one would be sitting at Jesus' right hand. They had declared undying loyalty. Peter even went so far as to say "even though all may fall away, yet I will not."

They'd left the lighted upper room where they'd shared the last supper, and entered the darkness of the garden.

An olive orchard away from the busyness of the city of Jerusalem.

Their faithfulness fails.

Their commitment fades away.

Their best intentions are lost in these moments of tiredness and fear.

Pray with me – but they are caught in their own thoughts and fears.

Remain with me – but they distance themselves by falling asleep.

Stay awake for me – but they miss the point right from the beginning.

The garden of the broken promises becomes the garden of the broken heart.

Jesus' disappointment goes deep.

Weighs heavily.

Aches unbearably.

No friends at his side – but God?!

In this situation of utter loneliness would he have known that God was still with him? Could Jesus have known this when he threw himself to the ground and prayed to his father?

He must have.

He speaks with God. Negotiates. Pleads.

And the outcome is: not what I want, but what you want.

In spite of his enormous pain Jesus can still make a decision: Whatever comes – it will be with God at his side.

This is it. That is how the passage ends.  
And this is hard to bear, - and to accept.  
But if we are truly honest, it is not so far away from our own life experiences and those of many others.  
At all times people made and make the experience that when our life is most desperate, when pain is all around, when our heart seems to break and everything is too much and unbearable we often are on our own.  
Alone.  
Only with God at our side.  
Think of Jacob struggling at Jabbok.  
Or think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian opposing the Hitler government in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich. There in his prison cell waiting for his execution, he was all alone. ...praying the very sentence from our passage:  
**Father,... remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want**

Sometimes, sometimes being alone, all alone, is something we have to endure.  
And having only God at our side – has to be enough.  
I know this sounds hard, but it is true.  
Amen.

### **Prayer**

Come, God.  
Come into the painful and lonely places.  
Come and hold me fast,  
ready to rock me,  
to calm me,  
to comfort me.  
Come, and meet my need.  
Come, and bring your peace.  
Amen.