

LISTENING TO YOUR HEART

Matthew 26:36-46

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First Christian Church

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Matthew 26: 36-46 (NRV)

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” And going a little farther, he threw 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.” Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

The official name is the Basilica of Agony, but it is one of the most magnificent churches in the Holy Land. Outside is a garden filled with the twisted trunks of ancient olive trees—the Garden of Gethsemane. Inside the church, the walls and ceilings are painted deep blue, the color of the night sky in Jerusalem. Against that breathtaking blue, murals tell the story of that night-- Jesus at prayer, Jesus betrayed by a kiss from Judas, Jesus under arrest as the disciples flee. Marble columns support gilded arches that stretch up to the cobalt blue ceiling, alabaster panels died violet are used for windows, the lights are low giving the pilgrims a sense that night has fallen. The faithful who come to kneel at the altar can reach out a hand and touch a raised stone slab and remember the night that Jesus threw himself on the ground and pled with his Father for another way out.

As he prays, as he pours out his heart, Jesus uses the word *abba*, the familiar or intimate form of the Aramaic word for father. We can compare it to the English word “papa.”

Since I have just returned from four days in Ogden visiting my granddaughter, Finley, I am thinking of this choice of words by Jesus in relationship to Finley’s nighttime ritual. Like most girls and boys approaching their second birthday, Finley gets her second wind after supper and is very busy playing with her toys right up until her bedtime. There are signs that she is sleepy--sometimes a yawn sneaks or Finley pauses to rub her sleepy eyes. But then it’s right back to her toys with a great sense of purpose...right up until the moment her Mom or Dad says the dreaded word *night-night*. Finley repeats the word with tears springing from her eyes and then she holds her arms up to my son, Ben.

“Dada,” she cries. Ben scoops her up and starts toward the bedroom. Finley isn’t happy about going to bed, but she is willing to surrender as long as her Dada is holding her tight. Not her Mama or Mimi or Granny, if she is visiting. Oh, no! Finley only trusts Dada to kiss her cheek and tuck her into her crib and rub her back and tell her goodnight.

“Papa,” Jesus cries, “if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet it’s not what I want. It’s what you want.”

An older English translation puts it this way: “Not my will but thy will be done.”

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their book *The Last Week* offer this insight on “thy will be done”--

This does not mean that Jesus' death was the will of God. It is never God's will that the righteous suffer. It was not God's will that Jesus died, any more than it was the will of God that any of the martyrs before and after Jesus were killed. Yet we may imagine them handing themselves over in the same way Jesus did, from Peter and Paul to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the nuns in El Salvador. Jesus' prayer reflects not a fatalistic resignation to the will of God, but a trusting in God in the midst of the direst of circumstances.

Not my will, but thy will be done, Jesus prays to his Papa.

Leslie Weatherhead in his classic book *The Will of God* writes:

I believe that the Cross was not the intention of God for Jesus. God's intention was that Jesus should be followed, not crucified. But when evil men thrust the Cross upon him, made the Cross an instrument of power by which the ultimate will of God could be done.

“Papa, not my will, but thy will be done,” Jesus prays.

There's another theme central to this final chapter in Jesus' life. It is the theme of failed discipleship on the part of those who claimed to be followers of Jesus. As the disciples walk with Jesus to Gethsemane in the cool of the evening, Jesus issues a warning:

“You will all become deserters this night.” Then Jesus reminds them of the Old Testament prophecy—“I will strike the shepherd and the flock will be scattered.”

After the warning, Peter makes his speech about never deserting Jesus. Earlier, Judas slipped away from the dinner to put his plans into motion. And later when the Roman soldiers come, everyone scatters.

“No, no...not us, Jesus. You can count on us.”

As Jesus prayed, Peter slept with a clear conscience because he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he would be true to Jesus no matter what. He was so confident...and he was completely wrong.

When Jesus came back midway through his prayer and shook the disciples awake, he looked straight into Peter's eyes.

“Stay awake, Peter, and pray that you may not come into the time of trial. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Perhaps it is Peter's complete and utter failure that makes us love him so much. He puts us in touch with our own shortcomings as followers of Jesus. We live with regrets. We are haunted by missed opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

This morning as we listen in our time of reflection for the still small voice of God, I invite you to consider the spiritual practice of confession. When we practice confession well, two things happen. We are liberated from guilt. And because we have named and claimed the sin we confess, that sin looks less attractive the next time around. Confession when it is practiced honestly and often helps us recognize and resist “the sin that clings so closely” in the words of Paul.

Once upon a time, an Eskimo hunter went to see the local missionary who had been preaching in his village.

“I want to ask you something,” the hunter said.

“What's that?” the missionary said.

“If I did not know about God and sin,” the hunter said, “would I go to hell?”

“No,” the missionary said, “not if you did not know.”

“Then why did you tell me?” asked the hunter.

We could all wish the same thing. But it’s too late. We know how often we miss the mark. Here’s how the prophet Isaiah anticipated the role the Messiah would play in saving all of us from our sin:

*Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

As Holy Week begins, we recognize that failed discipleship is a shortcoming we share with the first followers of Jesus. Too often we too have taken the easy way out, we have been happy to celebrate with the crowds and quick to make our exit in times of personal sacrifice. In order to be healed and changed, we need to confess our sins. What does the practice of confession look like?

We begin by placing ourselves into the care of the Holy Spirit and we ask the Spirit for help. Otherwise, if left to our own devices, we are quick to condemn ourselves for things beyond our control and just as quick to excuse the sins that really need our attention.

A story from the early history of General Electric tells of a brilliant electrical engineer named Charlie Steinmetz who was particularly brilliant when

it came to analyzing problems in complex machinery. One year long after Charlie's retirement, the best and the brightest at GE became completely baffled by a problem in a complex system of machines. They called up old Charlie who arrived and walked slowly around the entire system. He stopped at one point, pulled a piece of chalk out of his pocket, and drew a cross mark on one particular piece of one particular machine. To their amazement, when the engineers disassembled that part of the machine, it turned out to be the precise location of the breakdown.

A few days later the engineers receive a bill from Charlie for \$10,000 which was a lot of money in those days. GE sent the invoice back to Charlie and asked him to itemize it. A few days later, a revised bill came back that said the following:

Making one cross mark: \$1.00

Knowing where to put it: \$9,999.00

The Holy Spirit works just like Charlie when it comes to identifying the sin in our lives. Once we've asked the Spirit to help us see our sin more clearly, our confession can be specific. And then we can claim the promise found in 1 John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It is Holy Week and the story that teaches us about the amazing grace of God also reminds us that failed discipleship isn't just a first century problem. It's our problem, too. In this quiet time, brothers and sisters, let us confess our sins before God.