**Luke 22:44 - "The World Is Crowded With Gethsemanes"**

*A Sunday sermon focusing on Sept 11 and the Russian Tragedy.*

Source: https://www.sermons.com/sermon-prep

The Garden of Gethsemane is not really a garden but an orchard. Olive trees still grow there today. During Jesus day it was a place of business, an olive press producing the local areas supply of oil. This is where the word Gethsemane comes in. A gat (Hebrew) is a press, a large five-foot high square stone pillar, and a semane, or seman, is oil. So on the evening before his crucifixion he went to the orchard of the Olive Press with Peter, James, and John, to pray.

If you lived in the first century and worked with a gethsemane your day would be spent gathering olives, placing them in a woven fishnet like bag, and putting them on top of a stone table. This specially designed table is round with beveled edges that curve down to a trough. The trough is angled and funnels into a pot which holds the oil. The top is designed to receive the gethsemane. The tall square stone is lifted up and set on top of the basket and for several hours its tremendous weight is left there to crush the liquid from the olive.

It is no mistake that Jesus spent his last evening in the Garden of Gethsemane. From there he would leave to go to the cross and receive the weight of the world, the gethsemane of our sins, blood crushed from his body running down the cross to the world below. Luke describes the pressure Jesus suffered that evening: Being in anguish his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. It is an image of the gathsemane crushing the oil from the olive fruit.

Gethsemane ever since has come to symbolize suffering. And my friends the world is crowded with gethsemanes, Herods slaughtering the innocent. Look around the United States: Oklahoma City, Heath High School, Columbine, New York City. And around the world: Dunblane in Scotland, Halabja in Iraq (i.e., the gassing of the Kurds), Srebrenica in Bosnia, and now the town of Beslan, in Russia. Russia now has had its September 11. The world is full of gethsemanes, times when and towns where the innocent have suffered.

In the face of such unspeakable horror we ask ourselves these questions:

I

First who do we turn to? It is safe to say that all of us here mourned with those mothers and fathers in Russia who lost over 300 of their children. In a small town the loss of 300 children turns that village into a mausoleum. A thousand years from now people will say, Beslan, the place where all those children died. So who do we turn too? Can anybody help in the face of such a dreadful thing? It doesnt seem like it does it? The sorrow is so deep God seems absent.

Psalm 77, written in the Iron Age more than 2,500 years ago, stares straight in the face of some unspeakable horror that occurred to Israel. Will the Lord cast off for ever? the Psalmist asks. *And will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Doth his promise fail forever more? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? And I said, this is my infirmity."*

Who do we turn to when things are unexplainably painful? God? How can we when even he seems to be absent? My friends. I am not asking this question the Bible is. The Psalmist in essence is saying that there is no consolation, not even in God, when your soul has been torn from you. But even in great despair something faithful is happening. Even when we cry out God is not there we reveal our deep desire for God.

John Donne experienced his own Gethsemane. Donne was a 17th century poet, who experienced great pain. Because he married the daughter of a disapproving lord, he was fired from his job as assistant to the Lord Chancellor, yanked from his wife, and locked in a dungeon. (This is when he wrote that succinct line of despair, "John Donne/ Anne Donne/ Undone.") Later, he endured a long illness, which sapped his strength almost to the point of death. In the midst of this illness, Donne wrote a series of devotions on suffering which rank among the most poignant meditations on the subject. In one of these, he considers a parallel: The sickness, which keeps him in bed, forces him to think about his spiritual condition. Suffering gets our attention; it forces us to look to God, when otherwise we would just as well ignore Him.

Thats it. Suffering gets our attention. Suffering forces us to look toward one another; forces us to ask the deeper questions about life; forces us to turn toward God. Even if it is to express our displeasure and despair, we turn to Him and in those pleas we display our faith in Him.

II

The first question is: Who do we turn to? The second is: What are we to do? The answer here is obvious. We are to pray. When Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane he went there for one reason, to pray. Why are you sleeping, Jesus asked his disciples. Get up and pray! Prayer prepares the soul for suffering. Jesus understood what lie ahead and he knew that prayer was the only way to prepare them.

Prayer does two things for us. It helps us cope with hardship. There is a story about a missionary family in Pakistan who lost their 6-month-old baby. A wise man in the area heard of their grief and came to comfort them. He said, *A tragedy like this is similar to being plunged into boiling water. If you are an egg, your affliction will make you hard-boiled and unresponsive. If you are a potato, you will emerge soft and pliable, resilient and adaptable."* It may sound funny to God, but there have been times when I have prayed, "O Lord, let me be a potato."

Prayer helps us cope with hardship and then, heres the second thing, it guides away from temptation. Notice that Jesus told his disciples to pray so you will not fall into temptation. Now thats odd. You would expect Jesus to say, pray that you are able to endure the hardship to come. But hardship brings temptation: Temptation to compromise our principles, temptation to pursue pleasure over adversity, temptation to renounce our faith in God. Peter, James and John quickly learned this lesson as they denied that they knew Jesus. They left the scene of his betrayal afraid for their own lives. They did not pray so they did not stay.

Prayer helps us cope with lifes hardships and it keeps us from temptation. But here is one more thing you can do. Pray for the families of all those who have suffered at the hands of terrorist these past few years. Yesterday we remembered the horrible events of 911. We shall never forget that day. And, I dont think there is a parent here today who doesnt grieve for these Russian parents. Terrorism continues to tear at our world. I would like to see the church in every country rise up an army of prayer soldiers to pray for the defeat of this evil. Those who suffer need our prayer but Christians must also go on the offensive and pray Gods kingdom come his will be done. The world is dealing with a cult of death the church must offer a culture of life.

III

First question: Who do we turn to? Answer: God, even in our despair. Second question: What do we do? Answer: Pray to cope. Pray against temptation. Pray for one another. And pray for the Kingdom to come. Third question: Where do we go from here? Answer? Well this one is a little more complicated. The answer isnt easy because life isnt. When Jesus left Gethsemane he went to Golgotha. At times we all seem to be running form the garden of despair to the hill of suffering.

Look at the stories of the bible. At some time or another there has been a Gethsemane for all Gods people. For Abraham it was when he was askedto sacrifice his only son. For Joseph it was those unjust years in jail. Paul had any number of Gethsemanes in his experience; he once listed the number of times he had been stoned, whipped, robbed and shipwrecked. The following is from the poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, entitled Gethsemane:

*Down shadowy lanes, across strange streams Bridged over by our broken dreams; Behind the misty caps of years, Beyond the great salt fount of tears, The garden lies. Strive as you may, You cannot miss it in your way. All paths that have been, or shall be, Pass somewhere through Gethsemane. All those who journey, soon or late, Must pass within the gardens gate; Must kneel alone in darkness there, And battle with some fierce despair. God pity those who cannot say, Not mine but thine, who only pray, Let this cup pass, and cannot see The purpose in Gethsemane.*

It would be dishonest to say that God makes everything all right in this world. The death of 3000 innocent souls who were simply going to work on September 11, three years ago, tells me the world is crowded with Gethsemanes. The death of 1000 soldiers in Iraq tells me that peace has an enormous price. The burial of 350 children last week tells me that evil still wins in this world. Dont get me wrong. I as much as any man have hope in the resurrection. I am simply cannot deny the picture painted by the Psalmist when he asks, *Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Doth his promise fail forever more? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? And I said, this is my infirmity."*

So the answer to the third question? Where do we go from here? Perhaps Wilcoxs poem has it right: All paths that have been, or shall be, pass somewhere through Gethsemane. Amen.