

Jesus' School of Prayer
"A Pressing Matter"
October 25, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Matthew:

The overarching theme of the Gospel of Matthew is the role of Jesus as the Christ in relation to God's plan of salvation for all humanity. Toward the end of the 1st century CE, after the destruction of the temple, Judaism itself was in the process of being reshaped. During this time, Matthew redefined what it means to be God's people as those who share a common ancestry with the historic nation of Israel and also participate in the new way made available through "Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: (Matt 1:1) and the ruler of the universe (Matt 28:18).

Jesus was born in the house of the royal Davidic dynasty, in a family that reaches back to Abraham. His conception by the Holy Spirit set him apart from ordinary humans, and words of prophecy declare him as the one who will save his people. His public life begins with his baptism by John, after which a heavenly voice presents him as God's Son, whom God dearly loves. He proclaims the kingdom of heaven, performs miracles, and teaches his followers what it means to be righteous and how to enter God's kingdom. Above all, Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is the authoritative interpreter of the Jewish scriptures, which we know as the Old Testament. He fulfilled the Torah and the Prophets by teaching how they express God's will and by living out God's will in his own life and ministry. Jesus identified and exposed evil at work in the religious, political, and social structures of his time. By doing so, he became an enemy of the religious establishment and the Roman Empire. This ultimately led to his journey to Jerusalem and his confrontation with religious leaders (demonstration in the temple, etc.) leading to his arrest after his

time of anguished prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (literally, "olive press"). He is put on trial by the Jewish leadership and then sentenced to death and executed by the Roman military authority. The story ends with the resurrected Jesus encountering first Mary Magdalene and another Mary and then the 11 disciples, telling them to go to all the nations to make disciples, baptize them, and teach the good news. -adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 3-4 (NT)

Reflect on this Scripture:

Matthew 26: 36-46 NRSV ³⁶ 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." ³⁷ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." ³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ 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? ⁴¹ Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;[e] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³ Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ 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. ⁴⁶ Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Commentary

26:37-38. The three disciples are the same small, privileged group who were allowed to see Jesus' glory at the transfiguration (17:1) and who claimed to be willing to drink the same cup as Jesus (20:22) – i.e., willing to die for him (26:33). Matthew's depiction of Jesus at Gethsemane demonstrates his real human anxiety in the face of death. He who makes the presence of God real to others (1:23) longs for human companionship in his hour of need. "Stay awake" is not merely directed to the disciples' sleepiness, but echoes the apocalyptic warning of 24:42 (cf. 25:13) and points to the time of "testing" that draws near in the eschatological event of Jesus' death and resurrection, which approaches.

26:39-46. Jesus falls prostrate before God in prayer (lit., "on his face," as in Gen 17:3, 17; Num 14:5; 2 Sam 9:6; 1 Kgs 18:39; and as the disciples themselves had done in 17:3). The contrast between the willing spirit but the weakness of the flesh in v.41 is not a dualistic anthropology, but represents two aspects of the whole person that struggle with each other. Jesus himself is caught up in this struggle,

and his prayer moves from praying for deliverance from death (as often in the Psalms; Ps 118:17-18 had just been sung) to trust and commitment to God's will, using the identical words he had taught his disciples in 6:10. Jesus' three prayers form a dramatic contrast to the three denials of Peter, who sleeps instead of praying. After the prayer, Jesus is resolute and sovereign, and he announces the arrival of the betrayer in words that also connote the advent of the kingdom.

- adapted from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol VIII, pgs. 476-477

This week – A Pressing Matter. It was a place called Gethsemane. Ancient followers of Jesus pointed to this location on the way to the Mt. of Olives



and a church was built here in the 4th Century. While most of the Olive tree root system dates from the 12 century, a tree or two could be as early as the 1st Century, corresponding to Jesus' prayer in this garden. The word "Gethsemane" means "Olive Press." This means that likely this Olive Grove was equipped with the means to process olive oil. First, the olives would be crushed then scooped into a "mash sack." (see below)



then placed under a wooden press (see below)



So Gethsemane, or Olive press, is in a sense a metaphor for what Jesus is experiencing. He came announcing the kingdom of God, but the total rejection of his kingdom by Jerusalem and the religious establishment leads to this moment of anguished prayer: *"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."*

But the *"my will be done"* – *"crucify him!"* posture of the religious elite and the Friday morning crowd made drinking this 'cup' unavoidable. So at Gethsemane, Jesus anticipates the pressing, crushing reality of what he would be drinking in the next day – the cross. In this time of prayer, he was pressed (and anguished...grieved, agitated) to the degree that Luke tells us that *"his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground"* (22:44).

Ironically it is Jesus' inner circle, those most confident that they could drink of his cup (James and John - Matthew 20:22) and never deny/disown him (Peter – Matthew 26:35), who fall asleep rather than watch with him in prayer. *The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

Maybe it was only after this humbling experience that these overconfident, willful, ego-driven disciples could wake up and have their pride pressed from them as they learn to pray with Jesus *"your will be done."*

Maybe it is the same for us. As we face humbling reminders that we are not in control in these days, perhaps we can wake up and have our pride pressed from us as we learn the wisdom of the Gethsemane prayer, *"your will be done."*

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture:

1. How do you respond to Jesus' emotions in the Garden of Gethsemane? Does this window into Jesus' humanity trouble you? How do you relate to his human struggle at this point?

2. Peter, James and John confidently promised that they could die with Jesus but had a hard time praying with him for a few hours without falling asleep. Can you remember a time when you disappointed someone you loved? How did you respond to this "*spirit is willing but flesh is weak*" moment?
3. The 'olive press' of Gethsemane might be an apt metaphor for the one who was "*crushed for our iniquity*" (or sin – Isaiah 53:5a). How does Jesus' willingness to drink this "cup" (the cross) impact you?
4. Jesus prayed that he might avoid the cup, yet he ultimately prayed, not my will but "*your will be done.*" Think of a time that you were willing to accept a harder path that was initially not your will. Was there any positive result from this "your will be done" moment?"
5. How might praying this Gethsemane prayer "*your will be done*" impact your life, your decisions, your future?

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: Matt 26:41-42 ⁴¹ *Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; [e] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* ⁴² *Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."*
3. Each day this week, pray this prayer from gethsemane "your will be done." Ask God to show you practical ways of being a YOUR WILL BE DONE disciple.