

The Agony in the Garden: Good Friday 2019

- After the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus entered into an endless round of activities and was surrounded by people ::
 - Casting out the money changers from the Temple, teaching in the temple, debating with the pharisees, eating the Passover meal with his disciples...
 - And then, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus found himself alone
 - His disciples were there but, they were asleep.
- From the Mount of Olives, Jesus looked across the Kidron Valley towards the temple on the top of Mount Moriah.
 - The temple was only a short distance away across the valley, about a Sabbath Day's journey, or about 1 half-of-a-Roman mile
 - And as he watched the lights from 50-or-more torches and lanterns suddenly appeared at the gate at the western wall. He saw the lights moving in a double column along the roadway that led to the Garden.
 - And Jesus did not have to ask for whom they were coming; they were coming for him.
- Walking in the middle of the night, $\frac{3}{4}$ full moon, lights from the torches; it would only take a $\frac{1}{4}$ of an hour, maybe 30 minutes tops, to arrive at the garden.
 - That would give plenty of time to escape, to gather his men and make their way off into the dark
- He had made many an escape in the past
 - There was that time at his home town, in Nazareth, at the very beginning of his ministry, when everyone in the synagogue was going to throw him from the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them.
 - And there was that time at the Temple, when he said to the Pharisees in the Temple, "before Abraham came to be I AM." and they picked up stones to throw at him, but, again, he was able to hide.
- So it's come to this:
 - 15 minutes to a half-hour. What to do in 15 minutes?
 - "Well, if you don't have time for anything else, you can always pray."

- Jesus did exactly that throughout his ministry:
 - in deserted places (Lk 5:16), by himself (9:18), with his disciples (11:1)
- Two most significant times in the prayer life of Jesus came before his baptism, and at the time of his transfiguration.
 - And at both those times, Jesus heard a voice from heaven,
 - At the Jordan River, the voice of God said, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.
 - At the top of the mountain, in the presence of Moses and Elijah, God spoke and singled out Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, who would fulfill the law and the prophets.
- But there, on the Mount of Olives, there was no voice from the heavens; the voice of God has seemingly fallen silent.
 - That is not to say that God had abandoned Jesus; He does send an angel to comfort and strengthen Jesus,
 - This served as a reminder to his disciples, as they retold the story, that God is with us in the midst of suffering,
 - standing with us and beside us in every moment of our pain.
 - Reminding his disciples, and us, that when we are in sorrow or distress, we may not feel God’s voice or feel his presence, but he is there nonetheless, right beside us in that dark Garden surrounding us with his love.
- God was there to comfort Jesus when he was in such agony that his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood.
- Agony: agonia: front which we get our word “anguish” Agonia also means distress...or “struggle.”
- Struggle is an interesting word.
 - Other languages have similar words that combine the meanings for struggle and fighting and anguish:
 - Der Kampf (the fight, or the campaign, or the struggle)

- El Jihad (outwardly directed fight against tyranny, struggle within oneself for holiness),
- Der strijd (struggle, battle, fight, combat)
- Struggle, Der kämpf, El Jihad, Der Strijd:
 - So what is the struggle?
 - 1) Either we have a clear understanding of what God asks us to do in this world and we struggle to find a way to avoid that responsibility
 - 2). having a clear understanding of what God asks of us and we must strive within ourselves to accept that fate and put it into action.
 - Long before his time on the Mount of Olives, Jesus was abundantly clear about his fate, and he tried to explain it to his disciples on the road to Jerusalem, right after the Transfiguration:
 - He told them that, in Jerusalem, everything that was written by the prophets about the Son of Man would be accomplished. He would be handed over to the Gentiles, and be mocked and insulted and spat upon, and flogged and killed. (Lk 18: 31-33)
 - And although he would be rejected by humans, he also told his disciples that he would be raised up by God. (v.33)
 - The struggle, the jihad, der strijd, came because in the Garden, the voice of the Father had fallen silent.
 - In the quiet of the Garden, God was giving his Son his own space.
 - God the Father had made known his will. The Son must “struggle” to accept it.
- And it is here, in the Garden on the Mount of Olives, that our redemption begins.
 - Before the soldiers arrive, before the beating and scourging and the crucifixion...
 - There, in the silence of the night, broken only by the sounds of sleeping disciples and the ever-closer footsteps of soldiers, Jesus struggles in agony.
 - In a way, this struggle, this agony, absolves the sins of all his contemporaries, including those of the High Priest, Pontius Pilate and Judas Iscariot.
 - How is that possible?

- Luke maintains that Jesus did not die simply as the victim of scheming villains.
 - The crucifixion was not just a random act of cruelty. Instead, it was a carefully chosen destiny, accepted by Jesus
- At the end of his struggle, Jesus did accept his fate, his responsibility, his mission,
 - And from then on, Jesus was fully in control of his own destiny
 - He lays down his own life; others do not take it from him
 - In the Gospel of John, Jesus is not the victim of human injustice, even though those who killed him were unjust people.
 - By his agony in the Garden, Jesus could have escaped as he did many times before, but then there would be no escape for us.
- When Jesus stands to face his accusers in the Garden, he is ready to be the sacred, sacrificial lamb who will suffer for the sins of the world.
 - He is ready to fulfill the words of the prophet Isaiah (50: 6-7)
 - The Lord God is my help,
 - therefore I am not disgraced;
 - I have set my face like flint,
 - knowing that I shall not be put to shame (Is 50:6-7).
- There in the Garden, at the completion of his struggle, Jesus stands ready to offer his life for others so that they could see God's love revealed on the cross. (3:16)