

Prayer & Deliverance II, St. John's, 3/25/07, 5<sup>th</sup> Lent,

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father & our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

TEXT-Luke 22:39-42 And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. And when He came to the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done."

Each year for Christmas Karyl gives me a log book to record exercising. There are 2 pages for each week with pictures and quotes. The quote last week was from Joe Namath. "When you win, nothing hurts." Joe is right. The problem is we don't always win.

Our theme for today is "Prayer & Deliverance." Sometimes we pray for deliverance and nothing happens. We feel excluded. We wonder if we had realistic expectations. Let us try to learn from Jesus in our text.

We are one week away from Holy Week. That week Jesus endured a great amount of pain. We have seen that in the movie, "The Passion of the Christ." Being the Son of God did not lessen the pain.

What amazes me is the peace Jesus had in the midst of pain. After Jesus prayer in Gethsemane he said to the disciples, "Rise let us be going, see my betrayer is at hand." When the soldiers came to arrest him, he did not run. He asked them, "Who are you looking for?" They said, "Jesus of Nazareth." He answered, "I am he."

Jesus drew a great amount of strength from prayer. Prayer is a strong theme in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus prayed regularly, sometimes all night, especially at significant times in his life. He prayed at his baptism, before choosing 12 disciples, before Peter's confession, at the Transfiguration and Jesus dies praying. Jesus prayer at the Mount of Olives is consistent with the rest of Luke.

Jesus prayer at the Mount of Olives is before his arrest in all 4 Gospels. As readers we know that confrontation is building. In Luke the place is not called Gethsemane but the Mount of Olives, where it was his custom to pray. His kneeling indicates the intensity of his prayer. His sweat was like great drops of blood. Luke softens the failure of the disciples. Jesus prays once rather than 3 times. They were sleeping because of grief rather than weakness.

Jesus prayer comes from deep within him. He does not want to die on the cross. "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me..." He defines deliverance in terms of avoiding the cross.

The agony comes in determining God's will. If the cross is God's will, there is a purpose in it. If it is not the will of God, it is a meaningless sacrifice. Jesus needed a goal or direction. So he also prayed, "...not my will but yours be done." Deliverance is now defined as a direction or purpose.

When he finished praying, he had an answer. He believed the cross was the will of God. He had to know that.

This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> of 3 assurances of his mission. The 1<sup>st</sup> was a voice at his baptism, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." The 2<sup>nd</sup> was a voice at the Transfiguration, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him." The 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Mount of Olives the cup was not removed.

This prayer is decisive. It is the turning point in Jesus crisis. The pain was bad enough, but at least it had a purpose. I believe this prayer was crucial to Jesus peace in the rest of the passion. It is a turning point. Agony preceded it and peace followed it. In the future God would give Jesus the strength to endure the cross rather than avoid it.

We too search for a purpose in life, especially in a crisis. We are sailing along smoothly in life. We give and we receive.

Then sickness, unemployment or an accident happens. We pray for deliverance. We endure agony in finally coming to terms with it or in finding a direction.

Prayer is crucial. We wrestle with God. Our perspiration is like drops of blood. What is or is not God's will?

Our peace is often the promise to have the strength to face suffering. In our first lesson the Israelites had the strength to face their captivity. The result was deliverance as a new path in the Exodus and the release from Babylonian Captivity.

We may not want to hear that, but it is the truth and it is realistic. But we don't suffer alone. Jesus Christ suffers with us. We have a crucified Savior. This is the deliverance that God gives.

Another way state this truth is: there is a call in the cross and a cross in our call. First we'll look at the call in the cross.

Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow him. It is a high calling that gives us a purpose and direction. In baptism we die and rise with Christ. We are called to use our unique gifts and abilities in the opportunities that are before us.

Secondly there is a cross in our call. Evil is strong. There is conflict all around us. Our first response is to try to escape it. Many voices in advertising tell us to be as comfortable as possible.

But our faith says we are called to shed blood, sweat and tears for the Kingdom of God. It is even required. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a person, he call that person to come and die." In helping others, soon or later we will probably get hurt.

Let's be more specific. Jesus decisive prayer hinges on one word, "NEVERTHELESS." He prayed, "Remove this cup from me, nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.

Not nevertheless in terms of resignation or fate as "there's nothing I can do about this, God sent it, and I must grin and bear it." But nevertheless I'll do your will as an act of deliverance. "I'll trust you to give me the strength to bear it. The result is in your hands."

A crucial question in our prayer for deliverance is, “Can we honestly pray the “nevertheless?” There is often agony in getting to that point.

All of which places a tremendous emphasis on prayer. Here are some quotes I read last week:

“The way to remain triumphant in the time of trial, is through persistent, earnest and submissive prayer.”

“A lifetime of prayer is the source of strength for those who seek guidance and strength”

“We do not cry to God only in a crisis, as an insurance policy when there is damage. Prayer is not desperation or luck. It is a daily way to respond to God’s presence and seek the direction of God.”

Prayer is a daily life-time experience of being totally honest with God.

I will close with an example of someone who experienced power to bear pain. This patient had surgery in a Catholic hospital. She was to lay still and quiet on her back for 24 hours. As she looked up, the only thing she could see on the wall was a crucifix.

Her first response was that of anger. She was mad at God for not sending a miracle, so she wouldn’t need surgery.

But her second response was a change of heart. She realized that God did not will her pain but wanted her healed. The cross showed that God suffered with her in Jesus Christ.

In our Gethsemane experiences, let us look to the cross for strength. Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.