

“The Garden: Risking Temptation” Week Six of Lent

(Prelude)

Entering the Story

Crossing the Threshold

Pastor:

During Lent, we have taken six weeks to move through one week—
the last week of Jesus’ human life.
This has allowed us to expand time—
to “freeze frame” important moments
and dig deeper into our faith story,
and our own stories.
This morning marks the end of Lent
and the beginning of our commemoration of Holy Week,
and so let us speed up time a bit
as we first remember the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem.

Opening Responsive Hymn/Song

Pastor:

We found our place in the parade
and considered OUR place in the picture—
our role as supporters of Jesus’ mission in the world.
And then we found ourselves in the midst of the chaos
and throngs of people in Jerusalem for the Passover.
We stopped there...
suspending the action for a moment,
wondering how we could join Jesus in clearing out our own lives and hearts,
our own places of worship, t
o make them a more welcoming place for the love of God to reside fully.

We followed Jesus as he continued to teach in the city
and among the people at the temple.
His teachings filled our hearts as they filled those long ago,
and we remembered the call to proclaim justice
in the midst of injustice wherever we find it.
We joined the disciples at a table
of extravagant affection and overflowing love, and then another supper
where all our assumptions about the way the world works
were turned upside-down.

This week, we join Jesus in the Garden
Gethsemane is the moment when a chain of events begins that cannot be halted. Once
Jesus is taken into custody, there is no going back.
So we pause a moment with him in the garden just before his arrest,
and we feel with him the temptations that arise
when facing difficult circumstances—
to run, hide, use whatever power we have to change things,
fight it, perhaps even bargain with God.
We walk among the sleepy disciples
who just can't grasp what is about to happen.

Enter
Enter the story
Enter the place you belong
Not just looking on
For this is *your* story
Enter the story

Prayer of Confession

Pastor: Let us stand and pray together:

People:

Here we are, Jesus.

**We find ourselves alongside you in a garden of grief
for the violence so many of this world endure.**

We are tired. We don't know what to do next.

**And so we sleep sometimes,
hoping to awake from a bad dream.**

Forgive us, O God.

**Help us face this hour
knowing you are always here.**

You only ask the same of us... to be present, to be awake.

**You entered our story through Jesus,
now help us to enter fully into the story
of your kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.**

Enter
Enter the passion
Enter the place we belong
Not just looking on
For this is *our* passion
Enter the passion
Enter the story...
Enter the passion...
Enter his passion.

Assurance of Pardon and Entering the Peace of Christ

Pastor:

Know this:

We can open to let the story remind us
that no matter what we face,
or how we fail to meet the demand of the moment,
second chances are possible.
You are forgiven and freed,
encouraged and loved
by a God who wants you to live fully.
Let us enter the passion of Christ,
and pass the peace of Christ with each other.

Getting Perspective

Listening for the Story

Ephesians 6:11-17

Reader:

Jesus' defense in those moments in the garden was prayer—
not the sword that one of his disciples wanted to use to protect him,
but prayer was his source of power—
that God's will would sustain him through the next day.
Jesus knows what is about to go down,
and he will not use violence in these last hours.
The Letter to the Ephesians offers us the alternative "armor"
with which we can gird ourselves to work for what is right.

*"Put on God's armor so that you can
make a stand against the tricks of the devil.
We aren't fighting against human enemies
but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness,
and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens.
Therefore, pick up the full armor of God
so that you can stand your ground on the evil day
and after you have done everything possible to still stand.
So stand with the belt of truth around your waist,
justice as your breastplate,
and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready
to spread the good news of peace.
Above all, carry the shield of faith
so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one.
Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit,
which is God's word."*

Choral Anthem
"I Come to the Garden"

Dwelling in the Story
(A kind of "midrash" based on the artwork)

Dramatist: Too much wine, perhaps.
Or maybe I'm so sleepy because I'm just so very tired.
This week is taking its toll on me.
Watching our every step, wondering when the other shoe will drop,
afraid that the commotion stirred up about Jesus will result in something terrible.
I've been on edge ever since we got here.
But oh my, that parade!
Who would have thought that this man
I met on the shores of my fishing spot
would turn out to be three years of non-stop surprises?!
The entrance into Jerusalem was more amazing than all of it combined.
I felt sure that I was part of something that was going to change everything!
Now I'm not so sure.
Not everyone, it turned out, was so pleased about Jesus' arrival here.
And we've been under scrutiny for days.
Then tonight at the table,
Jesus revealed that one of us was about to hand him over.
I'm noticing who is missing here in the Garden,
and I'm wondering if maybe he was right.
My gut turns over with the thought of it.
I do not want to face that these people
who have become my family could turn against one another under pressure.
Fear threatens our very bonds!
So why put ourselves out here in the open?
I need to stay awake, keep watch! I've got my sword.
I know Jesus told me not to bring it, but come on!
All he seems to think we need to do is pray.
He asked us to pray with him.
Yes, I pray, I'm praying, I'll fervently pray!
But is it enough?
How can God help us if soldiers arrive?
And yet... I'm so sleepy.

Enter
Enter the passion
Enter the place we belong
Not just looking on
For this is *our* passion
Enter the passion
Enter the story...

Enter the passion...
Enter his passion.

Sermon

Jesus in the garden was one of my favorite stories as a child. I don't know if it was the huge drops of blood, or Jesus prayer to let this cup pass, or if it was simply the picture on the wall of the Sunday school room; you know the one – all moonlight and blues and Jesus sitting there with a ray of light descending on his head.

Now, from the perspective of a rather seasoned adult, I think I liked the Garden story because of its honesty. This was Jesus being just as human as we are. This was Jesus naming all he felt to a God he believed would listen. Because Jesus could do that and God was there for him, I believed God would be there for me even when life handed me things I didn't want to do.

Brene Brown, who describes herself as researcher and storyteller, did a podcast last week about what she calls FFT's. We are going to call them TFT's – Terrible First Times. I will leave it up to your imagination what she actually calls them.

Besides making me laugh in a week that was not particularly stellar, she also talked about strategies to help us when we are experiencing Terrible First Times. TFT's can be anything from learning to ride a bike or changing our hairstyle, to beginning a new relationship or hearing a diagnosis of a lifechanging disease.

Brown calls the pandemic we are experiencing as the worst TFT ever. I imagine all of us are saying "oh my gosh, yes, it is."

And in just saying those words – this is the worst Terrible First Time ever (actually, I think most of us would revert to Brown's original letter choice of FFT), there is an incredible release of the tension in our shoulders and almost an audible sigh as we breathe out the breath we have been holding ever since this started.

As I listened to Brown, I couldn't help but think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus did all the things that Brown talked about.

He named his Terrible First Time. He named the fear, the uncertainty, the "do I really have to do this moment?" Even though Jesus knew what wheels he had set in motion during the week – this was very scary and uncharted territory.

The honesty of asking for this cup to be removed from him gives us hope that we can name our desire for this pandemic to be taken from us; even as we know that while it will end, we do not know when.

I think that when Jesus prayed that night—admitted how terrified he was, how uncertain, how anxious, - the humming thread of God's love that runs through all creation kicked into high gear. He heard it and he felt it. He knew that as Martin Luther King, Jr said real power is the ability to affect change and achieve purpose.

We know that Jesus rose from that prayer to face his TFT. He rose in faith; he was willing to take the risk to trust that God would be with him.

We know the rest of that story.

We don't know the rest of the story of this pandemic, the worst TFT that most of us have experienced. We can however follow the example of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane; we can be honest, we can admit that we are terrified, we can reach out to others for support and to be support.

When we do that, our faith rises on that thread of God's love and we can risk leaping into our faith, believing and trusting that God will be with us.

Amen.

Zooming In

The Body of Christ Prays

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full on his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his wonder and grace

We remember today all who grieve,
who feel that they have no way out of their circumstances.

We mourn all who have no choice but to
live with violence that threatens their lives.

We remember those who work for less violence in the world,
creating protection and possibilities of a safer existence for all people.
And now let us call to our "mind's eye"—perhaps with eyes closed if you are
comfortable doing that—those people in our lives that need our
advocacy, presence and prayers.

I invite you to lift aloud names or places that you would add to our prayers today.

Repeat Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

A Time of Offering Ourselves

We offer a portion of our worldly goods and a portion of ourselves
in thanksgiving for what God has done, is doing, and will do.

In this time of separation, there are two ways to do this.

You may mail a contribution to St. John's Chapel

or you can go to our website

www.stjohnschapel.org and donate electronically.

Entering the World's Story

Closing Hymn/Song

"Abide with Me" Verses 1,3,5

Benediction

During this season of Lent,
and now this season of social distancing
we are putting a frame around a bit of life
we section off a scene of the Passion Week,
we look long into a face in the story,
to see what we can see,
to know what we can know.

When we put a frame around our own lives
we discover that there is beauty each day
in our own stories
in the stories around us
in the heartbreak and pain
and in the joy and awe
of simple moments.

Find those moments as we move forward
into what seems to be a very dark valley.
Those moments are moments you dare not miss.
Go in the love of God our Creator
the Strength of Christ our Savior
and the sweet communion of the Holy Spirit
who connects us even when we are apart. Amen.

Postlude

Worship Notes

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