

4.13.25 Palm Sunday The Garden of Prayer – Gethsemane Matthew 26.36-46

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Sarah Kemp who works so diligently and faithfully in the Meditation Garden here at BBC, heard from a visitor to the Garden Wednesday who said, *“Such a special place you have there. I feel the spirit of Christ when I walk its path, and I know it must give parishioners a lot of comfort. Just wonderful!”* Sarah shared with me that the garden is starting to come to life once again with blooming bulbs and Lenten Roses. Our volunteers have been working hard to enhance its beauty and create a welcoming space. The ultimate purpose of the garden is to experience God’s presence and bring people closer to God and it’s a great place to pray. Where do you like to pray? We know Jesus prayed at least once, and likely many times in a garden. Jesus' sorrowful time of prayer and subsequent betrayal and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane is described in all four Gospels. This heartrending experience has much to teach us about surrender, prayer, obedience, and grace.

Matthew 26:36-46, 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; 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.”***

In what we call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to say (Matthew 6:10), "*Your kingdom come. **Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.***" We say that every week as we did a few minutes ago. Many of us pray it every day. **It's a short phrase that's easy to say and difficult to live.** That phrase, "*Your will be done,*" contains the difference between the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane. In those two gardens, two choices were made that couldn't have had more different outcomes.

Two Gardens, Two Choices—The Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane

As we will see in our series on the Gardens of God, the Bible begins and ends with gardens, first in Eden, where humanity fell, and then in the New Jerusalem, where redemption is complete. But between these two gardens are two pivotal moments: Adam and Eve's disobedience in Eden and Jesus' submission and obedience in Gethsemane. These two events contrast humanity's failure and Christ's victory. In Eden, Adam and Eve basically said, "*Not thy will, but my will be done,*" while in Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "***Not my will, but your will be done.***" There are profound contrasts between these two gardens and their implications for our faith.

Consider these two gardens. Eden was a paradise created by God, filled with abundance and beauty (Genesis 2:8-9). Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect fellowship with God, free from sin or suffering. It was a place of light, joy, and harmony. Adam and Eve were given dominion over creation but were also commanded not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17).

Gethsemane, on the other hand, was a place of sorrow and darkness. Jesus entered this garden knowing He would soon face betrayal, suffering, and death. Unlike Eden's daylight innocence, Gethsemane's events unfolded under the cover of night—a symbol of humanity's spiritual darkness.

There was Temptation in both Gardens.

Adam and Eve failed to trust God's goodness, disobeyed God's command, and yielded to temptation. Adam and Eve chose their own desires over God's command. Their

disobedience brought sin into the world, leading to death and separation from God (Romans 5:12).

In Gethsemane, Jesus faced intense temptation as He prayed to His Father. **Three times** he asked if the "cup" of suffering could pass from Him but ultimately, he submitted to God's will (Matthew 26:39). Even though, as he would say, moments later in **Matthew 26:53**, *"Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"* Jesus faced greater temptation than Adam and Eve because he had more power at his disposal to get out of a terrible situation, like 60,000 angels, yet he didn't use them to save himself from suffering nor to inflict pain or revenge on others.

While Adam and Eve pursued their own will, Jesus triumphed through prayer and obedience to God's will and Christ's submission and surrender reversed the curse brought by humanity's sin.

The Responses in Eden and Gethsemane reflect the choice of Self-Will vs. God's Will. In Eden it was "My Will Be Done." Adam and Eve prioritized their desires over God's command. They saw that the forbidden fruit was *"good for food," "a delight to the eyes,"* and *"to be desired to make one wise"* (Genesis 3:6). Their choice reflected self-will—seeking independence from God rather than trust in God's wisdom and care.

In Gethsemane it was "Thy Will Be Done"

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane exemplifies perfect submission. Despite His anguish—sweating drops of blood according to Luke 22:44, Christ chose obedience over self-preservation. Jesus' response highlights the cost of discipleship: surrendering our will to align with God's purpose. This can be so difficult to do because all of us, if we're honest, like to and want to get our own way and we tend to get mad, angry, hurt or upset if we don't. This is true for two year olds and 82 year olds. As we heard last week though from 1 Corinthians 13, love does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable, or resentful or rude. Is that what our life, our behavior, and our speech reflect? It's what Jesus demonstrates in the garden of prayer. He does not insist on his own way.

Jesus' obedience in Gethsemane inspires us to reflect on areas where we resist God's plan due to fear or personal desires. Aligning our will with God's involves regular prayer for discernment, studying Scripture for guidance, and taking small steps of faith toward trust and surrender. By focusing on God's promises and seeking accountability from others, we can grow in our ability to say, ***"Your will be done."***

The consequences of the choices made in Eden and Gethsemane couldn't be more different. In Eden we see **The Curse of Sin**. Adam and Eve's disobedience brought separation and eventually death into what had been a beautiful picture of unity and harmony. The ground was cursed, relationships were fractured, and suffering became a part of life. Humanity was given a second chance, but they were driven out of Eden, so they couldn't access the tree of life (Genesis 3:24).

In Gethsemane we see **The Path to Redemption**. Jesus' obedience in Gethsemane set the stage for His atoning sacrifice on the cross and the triumph of the resurrection. Through His death, Christ demonstrated God's unbreakable love for humanity and bore the penalty for humanity's sin (Isaiah 53:5). The resurrection we celebrate next Sunday reflects God's ultimate power and victory. Unlike Adam and Eve's choice that led to separation, Jesus' faithfulness leads to redemption, reconciliation, and salvation for all who trust in what God has done (Romans 5:18-19).

The Power of Prayer

I called today's message, The Garden of Prayer. Did you notice in Eden with Adam and Eve, that there's no mention of them praying during their temptation? There was no pause, no, *"Hey let's take a step back here and think about the possible consequences and maybe pray if this is what we should do."* In contrast, Jesus prayed fervently in Gethsemane, showing us the importance of seeking God's strength in trials. Not once, not twice, but three times, Jesus is described as fervently and passionately seeking God's will and a path that wouldn't require suffering and the awfulness of the cross. Sadly, even though Jesus asked his innermost circle of Peter, James, and John to pray with him, they let him down and fell asleep. Like the disciples who fell asleep despite their best intentions, we may feel we've let Jesus down through spiritual

weakness, neglect, or some other failure. However, God's grace reminds us that failure is not final; God's forgiveness restores us when we repent. Trusting in the Lord's mercy allows us to learn from mistakes and grow stronger in faith through God's unfailing love.

The cost of Adam and Eve's disobedience was devastating. Their choice led to separation from God and death. Sin leads to separation from God. Thankfully, the reward of Jesus' obedience led to salvation for all who believe in Him. Submission to God's will may be costly but brings eternal rewards.

Where Adam and Eve failed as humanity's representatives, Jesus succeeded as the "last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45). Through Christ's obedience, we're offered new life. Brian Morykon of Renovare writes about this scene in the Garden of Prayer: "Here, Christ is our Greatest Teacher by being the Greatest Student. **Hebrews 5:8** states:

"Though he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." Even Christ himself had to learn obedience through suffering. And in that learning, in drinking his Great Cup, he taught us how to drink our little cups. See him in the garden in his final hour. See him face down, praying, all sweat and distress.

He didn't blame Judas. He didn't blame his Father. He didn't deny the difficulty.

He didn't try to do it alone (though in the end, he did—*Can't you keep watch with me?*)

He pleaded for another way.

Finally, he rose, with resolution not resignation, in submission not self-pity.

His suffering became our salvation, not just from the power of sin, hell, and death, but from meaningless suffering. His cross is our eternal meditation to make some sense of our suffering—or, if not that, to fill us with courage to face it. It endowed his words with the power of lived experience."

So, we have the story of two gardens—Eden and Gethsemane— which reveal humanity's greatest failure and Christ's greatest triumph. In Eden, humanity chose self-will over God's will; in Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to choose God's will over self-preservation. These contrasting choices define the gospel message.

As we reflect on these gardens, we can ask ourselves: Are we living like Adam and Eve in Eden or like Christ in Gethsemane? Are we saying, "My will be done," or are we surrendering daily with **"Thy will be done"**? May we follow Jesus' example of obedience so that we may experience the life He offers through His sacrifice.

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, as we reflect on Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, we're reminded of the importance of surrendering to Your will, even in times of great personal struggle. Help us to trust in Your plan and to say with Jesus, *"Not my will, but Yours be done."* We acknowledge our own weaknesses and failures, like the disciples who fell asleep, and we ask for Your grace to forgive and restore us. May we learn from their mistakes and cultivate spiritual discipline through consistent prayer and study of the Word. As we compare the disobedience in Eden with Jesus' obedience, remind us of the transformative power of choosing Your will. Give us the courage to align our desires with Yours, knowing that Your ways are higher and lead to redemption and eternal life. Thank You for Your unending love and mercy that guides us forward even when we stumble. Amen.

Blessing: Let's leave today resolved to pray and live as Jesus did in Gethsemane, the Garden of Prayer, saying with trust and vulnerability **not my will but Yours be done**—and live lives that reflect Jesus' submission, obedience, and love.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. What does Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane teach us about surrendering to God's will, especially in times of personal agony? How can we apply this lesson in our own lives?
2. Why do you think the disciples struggled to stay awake and pray with Jesus? Have you ever felt spiritually "weak" despite having good intentions? How can we overcome such moments?
3. In what ways do the choices made in Eden ("My will be done") and Gethsemane ("Thy will be done") reflect different approaches to temptation and obedience? Which garden resonates more with your current spiritual journey?

4. Jesus prayed fervently three times, seeking strength to face His suffering. How does this passage challenge your perspective on the importance of prayer during trials?
5. Jesus chose obedience even when it was costly. Are there areas in your life where you struggle to say, "Not my will, but Yours be done"? What steps can you take to align your will with God's?
6. Compare the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience in Eden with Jesus' obedience in Gethsemane. How does this contrast encourage us to choose God's will over our own desires?
7. Have you ever felt like you let Jesus down, like the disciples falling asleep? What truths about God's grace help you move forward and learn from such failures?