

**GOOD FRIDAY**  
**April 19, 2019**

Text: Luke 22:39-46

Theme: Garden of Gethsemane

On Palm Sunday we stood on the Mount of Olives and we were able to visualize Jesus riding down the steep path on his way to Jerusalem. According to the *Gospel of Luke*, Jesus returned to the mount and wept over the city because of its failure to see and believe that he was the promised Messiah. From there Jesus went to the temple to teach but first he had to drive out all those who had made their house of prayer into a cheap marketplace.

By now Jesus was being asked all kinds of questions that were meant to trap him. By what authority do you do these things? Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or do your laws supersede our laws? In the resurrection whose wife (will the woman be) after seven childless marriages? How can people say that the Messiah is the son of David? When will the destruction of the temple happen and what will be the sign that it is about to take place?

Every day he taught in the temple and answered their relentless questions and every night he returned to the Mount of Olives.

And this is where we pick up the passion narrative at the twelfth hour on Good Friday. Just prior, Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover meal in what is called the *Upper Room*. At the end of the meal Jesus made it clear to Judas that he knew Judas would betray him.

What we see unfolding next should confirm for us that all along Jesus was set on obeying the will of God. It would have been so easy for Jesus to leave the *Upper Room* and find a place to hide. In other Scripture passages that we have been reading during Lent we learned that he could no longer walk around openly so he found a remote place to stay. But he is aware that the time has come so he and his followers go to the first place that his enemies would search for him. As was his custom he went to the Mount of Olives.

And on the Mount of Olives (in the Garden of Gethsemane) we are blessed to hear another lesson on prayer. Earlier Jesus taught his disciples what to pray and now he will teach them how to pray. As he leaves them alone he finds his own quiet place to kneel and to have a private conversation with his heavenly Father.

We must not miss the significance of Jesus in this prayer. On Ash Wednesday we heard Jesus tell his disciples that whenever they were to pray they were not to be like the hypocrites who loved to stand and pray in the synagogues and at street corners so that they may be seen by others. Rather they were to go to a secluded spot and speak with God.

Jesus kneeled in prayer to show us he was submissive to the will of God. Jesus kneeled in prayer to show us that he and his disciples were facing a crisis. And when he spoke he was succinct and precise with his words. *Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Still not my will but yours be done.*

It is here in the Garden of Gethsemane that we hear Jesus in his humanity trying to come to grips with the looming reality of the coming days. But we need to listen carefully. In his desire that God remove the cup, he also affirms that his future lies in the hands of God and no other. If Jesus were to bypass this suffering and death then it would be because God alone introduced an alternate path for him to follow. No matter what God decided, Jesus already made the decision that he would follow the will of God.

It is the next sentence that follows (yet not my will but yours be done) that trips us up all the time. We have turned this phrase into our own question for God to answer and we are just as relentless as those who persisted with Jesus:

*What is the will of God for us?*

*And how will we know if it comes from God?*

Here it is! We want to know exactly what we are to do with our lives. We want to know that we are on the right path. We want God to be as specific as possible because it must be clear that it comes from God and it is not the devil knocking on our door.

In Scripture there are two ways to think about the will of God. In one instance it is what God commands of us. In Proverbs 3 it is the will of God for us to trust in the Lord with all our heart. In 1 Thessalonians 5 it is the will of God that we give thanks in all circumstances. In Hebrews 13 it is the will of God that we do what is pleasing in his sight. And (to save the best for last) in Micah 6 it is the will of God that we do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with our God.

But (Pastor Kessinger) that is all well and good but what is the will of God for me? Will God be more specific so I know what I am to do?

Let us explore the second way to think about the will of God and then I will attempt to answer those two questions. When Jesus is on his knees in prayer and he confesses – *still not my will but your will be done* – he is telling us that God is in control of all that will come to pass and (for his part) he will do whatever it takes to be the means by which God fulfills his purpose. Jesus is telling us on the day that we remember his suffering and death that for him to do the will of God means he will trust that God will work good out of his pain and anguish. In the few words that he spoke he turned his human desire to be saved from the impending crisis into a prayer to be saved in the situation he must now face.

*What is the will of God? Do I move or do I stay here in this area? I want to use my free time wisely and I want to know what God has in mind for me to do now. Is this the person I should marry? Should I walk away from my marriage?*

Immediately before he is arrested Jesus is teaching us how to pray so we know the will of God. We start with kneeling to be submissive to his will. In that simple act alone we believe that God is in control of every aspect of our lives. And knowing that God is in control of every part of our lives then we ask God to test our hearts. We decide if we are to move or not, we decide what we are to do next, we decide about our relationships with others and then based on our decisions we ask: Does our decision allow us to trust the Lord with our whole heart? Will it allow us to be thankful? Will it be pleasing to God? Will it bring about some kind of justice or will it offer some kindness to another or will it humble us before the Almighty God? Does our decision help fulfill the purposes of God?

At the end of his prayer Jesus was able to stand up knowing the will of God. He stood up with confidence that God was in control and would be with him through his ordeal. Jesus trusted his Father. Jesus was thankful that God was fulfilling his purpose through him. And there is no doubt that his suffering and death brought justice to those who believe. It allowed Jesus to offer kindness and forgiveness to the thief that hung next to him. And as we read in Philippians 3 it is this same Jesus (who found himself in human form) could now humble himself and become obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Amen