

The Importance of Gethsemane

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: Matthew 26:36-46

One of my earliest childhood memories is sitting in the little Friends Meetinghouse in Spiceland, Indiana, where my Uncle was the minister, and looking up at this huge stained glass window behind the lectern. The window depicted the scene of Jesus in Gethsemane...purple in background, with Jesus sitting beside a rock praying, looking up toward the sky, with yellow beams of light shining down upon him. It left quite an impression.

The drama of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is one of the most remarkable scenes in the gospels. Here in Gethsemane we see Jesus in his complete humanity. In this final struggle with his humanity, Mark introduces the conflict with the words, "He began to be panic-stricken and distraught." Matthew characterizes Jesus as "sorrowful and troubled."

Matthew's account of what took place at Gethsemane indicates that it was a soul-wrenching experience for Jesus. The soul of God and the soul of Jesus engaged with one another. Three times Matthew tells us that Jesus prayed, "My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." And three times he returned to the three

slumbering disciples to garner their support, “Won’t you watch with me, just one hour?”

If it helps you to understand those moments in the garden, place yourself in the position of Jesus. He is only 33 years of age, and he is facing death. According to most standards, he is leaving this earth with so little accomplished, and with so much more to do. How would you feel facing an execution, knowing that you were innocent? How would it be for you, trying to accept that which you do not fully understand with your life on the line? And if ever there is a portion of Scripture that confirms and affirms Jesus’ humanity as well as his spirituality, the scene at Gethsemane does that.

Gethsemane is a place where souls meet. I would suggest this morning that for those who are 21st century spiritual seekers, Gethsemane is any place and any time when we struggle to know the will of God for our lives. Gethsemane is a spiritual environment that is charged with possibility and hope, healing and risk. It is difficult to clearly know God’s purpose and will for our lives, and when we believe that we finally know, we then must agonize over a decision to follow or to hold back.

Think about the last time that you were in Gethsemane...in that place where souls meet. Every time that we seek to know the will of God for the future

direction of Cincinnati Meeting, we are in Gethsemane...As we seek direction and clarification in our personal concerns, we are in Gethsemane...As we agonize and seek release from our trying circumstances, we are in Gethsemane...Whatever it is that thrusts us into a state of aloneness with God, where souls touch, that is a Gethsemane experience. And we need Gethsemane. We need Gethsemane in order to make caring decisions about ourselves and others. We need the courage and strength that comes from being alone with God, sharing in a meditative silence when we open our hearts to that “still small voice.”

It is important to note in the passage I read from Matthew, that at the end of his struggle in the Garden, Jesus returned to the sleeping disciples, awakened his companions, and said, “Behold, the hour is at hand, and the son of man is betrayed. **Rise, let us be going.**”

As is always the case in the life of Jesus, the quiet meditative time of prayer, issues in action. When Jesus would withdraw from the world of activity to be alone with God, his pattern would be to return to the world preaching, teaching and healing. As souls meet and touch, a spiritual energy is generated for the *living* of one’s faith. Decisions made in the quiet garden, must then be acted upon in the world. Jesus leaves Gethsemane with this resolve: “Rise, let us be going...” To the last, Jesus acted upon his faith...He accepted his fate, and walked into the hands of

his betrayers and killers. You see, it is not enough to “go to dark Gethsemane” to pray. *In the end, one must leave Gethsemane to live out one’s faith.*

I hope that Gethsemane will take on more and more importance for us in our continued journeys of faith. I want to remember Gethsemane, that place *where souls meet*, as I confront important decisions and crucial matters in my own life. And then following my time in Gethsemane, I hope to rise and go in faith to do what God would have me do.