



Hazelbank Presbyterian Church



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Our Text for this morning is taken from Mark's Gospel chapter 14 where we read this morning:

³²They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ³⁴"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." ³⁵Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

I know many of you have taken time over the last couple of years to watch the film the "Passion of the Christ". For me the most moving part of the film came at the very start where we saw perhaps the real battle going on in the garden of Gethsemane. The spiritual battle, the battle that we are all engaged in and one which more often than not we run from or we are simply unaware of what is happening. Regardless of how the movie affected you this initial scene of spiritual agony was very graphic. I know some of you have decided for your own good reasons that you do not want to see the movie and I respect that but let me try to explain what I am talking about. A figure appears to be talking to Christ and there is a moment or two with a serpent slithering along upon the ground, the reference obviously being that this must be Satan tempting Jesus. You can see the agony in his face and body as there is obviously a wrestling going on, not in a physical sense but in a spiritual one where Jesus is being tempted to pack it all in and walk away from the cross.

This is a story of temptation and the way out of that temptation. There is a bird called a lapwing and some of you might know of it. It builds its nest on the ground and in short grass. A strange place to build a nest because it leaves itself wide open to foxes and other predators who might want an egg or two for breakfast or indeed want to eat the bird herself. Wild animals love to try to get them, the fun part is when they get close to her nest she will move off and act as if her wing is broke so they will try to grab her. She will flutter the wing to make it look like it is broken. Each time they get close she will move a little further off until they are away from the nest. Then she will just fly off.

This is what the devil does. He shows you things that you think sparkle and things you can achieve if you just go a little further it will be yours, but he keeps moving you farther and farther away from God's plan for you. Then when you are away from the blessing that God had for you to receive, he will just fly off and leave you all alone. Don't follow the temptation of Satan and lose the prize egg that was at your feet. Go back to where he started tempting you and look around for the nest egg that God has in store for you. It will be found close by where you stood before temptation took over. Look closely, seek and you will find.

The opening words of Mark 14:32 say "And they went to a place named Gethsemane." As humans we will never know the pressure Jesus was under. Oh yes we have been in

situations when we were so stressed we perhaps thought that we would faint or have a breakdown. Oh yes there have been times when we have not slept at night because of the postman's letter in the morning. Times we have not eaten because of the interview that day or the meeting with the consultant or the bank manager. There have been times when the stress has built and built upon us to such an extent that perhaps felt that couldn't go on. But this is nothing like, nowhere near like what Jesus had to go through.

Here is Jesus at Gethsemane, the garden whose name meant "Oil Press" - the place where the olive would be crushed to produce the oil. And the place where Jesus submitted to being "crushed for our iniquities;" Isaiah 53 goes on to say:

"the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

This is what we remember at our communion services, when we come to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper - Jesus being crushed so we could be healed. It is interesting that Jesus went to the "Garden of Gethsemane" on the Mount of Olives. The garden still exists today, including a number of olive trees, which may date back to the time of Jesus.

"Gethsemane" comes to us from the Hebrew into the Greek and then the English. In a sense, the two greatest "battles" of history were fought in gardens. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, bringing sin to the human race. I cannot help but wonder if this is where Mel Gibson got his inspiration from when he directed the Passion, seeing the snake once again being the tempter in the garden. Eve and those of you who have read the bestselling book, "captivating", realise Adam also fell to the temptation of eating the forbidden fruit. We are here today worshipping God in faith because Jesus did not resist temptation, but chose his Father's will over what may have fast been becoming his will. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, chose the Father's will over His own (human) will. Although the pain and spiritual misery of the cross awaited Jesus, it seems as though the internal battle was fought in the Garden. Just as Adam's decision in Eden affected all who are related to Adam, so Christ's decision in Gethsemane affects all who are related to Him by faith.

Jesus, as both God and man, had a sinless human nature and a divine nature. He had a human will and a divine will that worked in harmony. In Gethsemane, we get the clearest picture of how He submitted His human will to the Father. This is what we remember as we celebrate the Lord's Supper - Jesus submitting to the Father, and dying so our sins could be forgiven.

Two things I want us to think briefly upon this morning.

1. Christ's Submission to God's will
2. Our own submission to God's will

I know we have looked at this area before but this is an area that constantly appears in the Bible and as such we need to address it whenever it does.

1) Christ's submission.

Submission to whom or what you might ask. Submission to God's will upon his life as God's singular purpose for Christ's mission on earth became as focused and as intense as a spiritual laser. Under the focus of this force Jesus Christ found himself. What a

incredible place to be in the centre of God's will for your life. Jesus had set his face towards Jerusalem very early on in his ministry and all the way through his time on earth this night in the garden was going to be a make or break point in human terms. Although this was the Son of God - fully God, we must never lose sight of the fact that he was also fully man and it was here in the garden that the man in Christ came before God the father and asked if there was possibly another way of doing this then please let it happen...

There was another way of course that it could have happened. Jesus could have been told by God that the cross was asking too much. He could have been told that the weight of the world's sin was too much for one person to have to pay. He could have called the whole thing off and walked away. If he did, then the sin in each of our lives would still be upon us and we would still have to face the righteous judgment of Almighty God and pay the price of quite literally Eternal Damnation, separation from God for the rest of eternity. There is no way we could ever hope to have stood before God, in the strength of our own goodness and ever survived... This was done for us by Christ because there was no other way. That is why the most precious verse in the Bible is John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life.”

God's love for us - to send his only Son to die for us. Christ's love for us - that he should obey the Father and die willingly for us. “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see.”

"...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus submitted to God's will for him even though his humanity shrank from it – what are we prepared to do for God?

This is the focus of our second thought today:

2. Our own submission to God's will.

Some of us are like the Presbyterian minister who was on a diet and prayed as he drove to work - "Now, Lord if it is your Will for me not to have any donuts this morning You make sure there are no parking places in front of the donut shop." And he later said, "I ate the donuts because there were two places right up front on only my 8th trip around the block."

We need to make sure we don't play the game of making God's guidance fit what we want rather than seeing if what we want actually fits His plans. Surely if Christ was prepared to do this for us we should be completely prepared to do whatever he asks of us? Shouldn't we?... True Biblical worship so satisfies our total personality that we don't have to shop around for man-made substitutes.

I am sure we are all aware of Romans 8:28 which says:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God and have been called according to His purpose...

This is sadly one of those greatly half understood verses. When we read this verse we tell ourselves that this verse means that no matter what happens in life everything will be ok for us so long as we love God and have accepted his will for our lives....

And it does mean this to a point but what it really means is that the good that is achieved is God's good, and because it is God's good our love for him and our desire to be submitted to his will for us makes it our good – even if we don't necessarily see it that way at the time. We think that it will work out brilliantly for us, and sometimes it does, but if our lives are grounded in God and in love for God and in submission to God then then all things will work together for, not necessarily our good in a human sense, but certainly for God's glory and therefore for our good in a spiritual sense. To submit to God and to let his will for you be the motivation for putting your feet on the floor in the morning, to let your soul listen to that still small voice of prompting in your prayer time be the loudest noise you obey that day, to let that passage from God's word that you read that morning be the light to your path and the lamp to your feet and to let God's will become your will brings God the glory and you the peace that passes understanding.

R T Kendal who is the main speaker at New Horizon this year speaks about our biggest problem in submitting to God's will in his latest book "Out of the Comfort Zone."

He writes, and with this I finish:

It is one thing to choose to go outside your comfort zone; quite another to find yourself outside your comfort zone involuntarily. However much you try to like where you are now or do what you used to do, you are simply outside your comfort zone. You want things to be like they used to be and nothing is the same. Being outside your comfort zone is not fun. You are uneasy. You yearn for the familiar. You want what will make you feel good – naturally. Seeking one's comfort zone is one of the most natural things in the world to do. And yet if at the natural level you cannot always stay in your comfort zone, how much more is this true at the spiritual level. As I said, God almost always requires his servants to move outside their comfort zone. Read Hebrews 11, the 'faith chapter' of the Bible. There is a common thread that runs right through the chapter and characterises each person who did what they did by faith; they all had to move outside their comfort zone and not a single one of them had the luxury of repeating what had been done before them. For it is easy to do what you know has been done before, where there is a precedent for what you are doing; because it is safe. In CS Lewis's 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe' are the unforgettable lines:

'Ooh!' said Susan... 'Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.'

'That you will, dearie, and no mistake: said Mrs Beaver, 'if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.'

'Then he isn't safe?' said Lucy.

'Safe?' said Mr Beaver, 'Don't you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.'

God isn't safe.

But he's good.

We must never forget this when outside our comfort zone but in God's will. God wants only what is best for us. When we are directed by the Holy Spirit to be outside our comfort zone, it is always for our good.

This is how we bring Glory to God, this is how we honour Him in our daily lives, this is where our will becomes His will.

Peter T. Forsythe was right when he said, "The first duty of every soul is to find not its freedom - but its Master".

Let us pray together.