

# *Jesus in the Garden*

## **WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY**

Last in a four-week series

November 22, 2020

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*Matthew 26:26–46 (NRSV)*

<sup>26</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” <sup>27</sup> Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

<sup>30</sup> When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written,

‘I will strike the shepherd,  
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

<sup>32</sup> But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.” <sup>33</sup> Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” <sup>35</sup> Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

<sup>36</sup> 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.” <sup>37</sup> He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. <sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” <sup>39</sup> 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.” <sup>40</sup> 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? <sup>41</sup> Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” <sup>42</sup> Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” <sup>43</sup> Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. <sup>44</sup> So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. <sup>45</sup> 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. <sup>46</sup> Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

*Courage: To remain faithful, simply to remain, in the face of certain crucifixion.*

The last three weeks, we’ve heard stories of men and women who were faced with fearful and anxious circumstances. This week, we turn to Jesus who faced the worst of circumstances, leaning into fear with faith.

*The hour has come*

How shaken the disciples must have been. Their Passover supper together had taken a bad turn. Would one of them truly betray Jesus? Would it be Judas? And now, as Jesus led them to the Mount of Olives, a heavy darkness fell across them all.

After a bit, Jesus turned to look at the stumbling disciples. He warned them that they would all fall away. But Peter looked directly at Jesus and declared that though the rest of the disciples might abandon Jesus, Peter never would. Jesus persisted. Before this very night was out and the rooster welcomed a new morning, Peter would deny that he even knew Jesus – not once, but three times. Peter insisted that he would stay faithful all the way. The others did too. And they continued to make their way through the night.

Jesus led them to a quiet place filled with olive trees. The grove of trees had an olive press and the garden was named for that press – Gethsemane.

As they settled in, Jesus asked his disciples to sit and to wait. He wanted to pray nearby, knowing what lay just ahead. He would have to endure this trial alone, but he needed his friends with him now, so Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to join him. Visibly distressed, troubled down to his soul, Jesus told the trio to keep watch.

### A Tale of Two Gardens

Adam was once in a garden. He had the opportunity to be obedient, to trust that God knows best and, thus, refuse to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. But Adam did not trust. He was not obedient. He came to his time of testing and trial . . . and failed. His disobedience set in motion the wrecking of humanity's relationship with God and the distortion of all creation.

Jesus, on the other hand, came to a garden on that spring night in 30AD. Like Adam, Jesus' obedience was tested. The gospel accounts of Jesus' Gethsemane experience reveal a man struggling with his choice, struggling to be obedient to his father. But where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. And in this lies our own salvation.

The Garden of Gethsemane is the reversal of the Garden of Eden. Jesus' decision to remain faithful in his obedience, to press on to the cross was the means for the healing of relationship and the restoration of the cosmos. As Paul would write in his letter to the Romans, "For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (5:19).

Despite our proclamation that Jesus was fully divine and fully human, we sometimes tend to cloud over his humanity. We have trouble imagining that Jesus was truly fearful or anxious, as if the right question is "How could God be scared?" But that's not the right question. Instead, we must strive to resist the temptation to see Jesus as less than human. Jesus faced the temptations and trials we face. For as D. Hare writes, "If Jesus was not fully human, the cross was an empty pantomime."

When Jesus fell to the ground in prayer, he felt nearly overwhelmed. Please, Lord, let this cup pass. Isn't there another way? Must I? . . . but . . . may your will be done, Father, not mine. . . .

Then Jesus got up and returned to the three posted on watch. He soon saw that all three were sleeping. Confronting Peter, Jesus warned him that a trial lay ahead. If Peter couldn't stay awake for an hour, how could he ever hope to keep his promise to stay with Jesus to the end. Your spirit may wish to stay faithful, Jesus said, but your flesh is weak.

Jesus left the three a second time to return to prayer. And again the disciples fell asleep. When Jesus awakened them a second time, none of them could say a thing. They couldn't even look at Jesus.

And again Jesus went to pray. And again the disciples failed him. Perhaps with a note of exasperation, Jesus told them to get up. It was time. The hour had come. Let's go, he told them. The betrayer was arriving.

And sure enough, as the disciples stumbled to their feet, they saw Judas walking toward them and a large group of armed men following close behind, the arresting party sent by the chief priests. Truly, the hour had come.

### *Falling asleep*

Could the disciples really be so blind, so weak? In Peter, James, and John, Jesus has with him those who were there from the beginning. How hurt must Jesus have been that they had not remained vigilant, sensing the foreboding of this long night? Peter had been so insistent that even if all the rest fell away, Peter would stay true, faithful, beside Jesus to wherever it was they were headed.

And yet Peter too fell asleep. Three times. In a few hours he would deny knowing Jesus – three times. Of course it hurt Jesus, even though he knew how weak, how human, these men were.

I suppose that in their weakness and frailty, we can find encouragement. Jesus led them, taught them, lived with them, loved them . . . and built his church on them. We don't have to be super-heroes to be God's hands and feet in this world. God often uses us despite ourselves.

R. Kent Hughes makes an interesting point about this. He speaks of Jesus "steeling" the disciples, filling them with resolution and determination. Years later, how often would the disciples look back on their time in Gethsemane and resolve to do better.

We must understand that Jesus invited the inner circle to be with him in Gethsemane not because he needed company, but because they needed to learn (especially with their presumption) the secret of steeling their lives for service. The scandal of their failure that night could not be suppressed and underlines the necessity of what Jesus was teaching for the Church Universal.

Verse 34b shows that when Jesus was overtaken with the horror, he told them, "Stay here and keep watch." He wanted them to observe his battle. Luke tells us that he even stated the reason: "Pray that you will not fall into temptation" (22:40). If they had watched closely and entered into prayer like his, they would have found the steel necessary to make it through what was coming. They did watch for a little

while, but then shamefully dozed off despite the mortal, noisy combat and suffering of Christ. Jesus desired so much that they learn from him, that in the midst of his unparalleled agony he returned twice more to look after his three weak followers.

When he first returned, he singled out the most vocal of the three, Peter. "Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Simon,' he said to Peter, 'are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak'" (vv. 37, 38). There was kindness here. Jesus understood human weakness, but they must pray or they would fall. Mark says, "Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him" (vv. 39, 40). Finally we read: "Returning the third time, he said to them, 'Are you

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German Lutheran pastor who publicly opposed the Nazis from 1933 until his execution. In 1943 he was implicated in a plot to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer was jailed by the Nazis and later hung.

This is what we might call Bonhoeffer's "Gethsemane prayer" as he faced his own death at the hands of executioners.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**  
**"condemned to death"**

O Lord God,  
Great is the misery that has come upon me.  
My cares overwhelm me: I am at a loss.  
O God, comfort and help me.  
Give me strength to bear what you send,  
And do not let fear rule over me.  
As a loving Father, take care of my loved ones,  
My wife and children.

O merciful God,  
Forgive all the sins I have committed  
Against you and against my fellow men.  
I put my trust in your grace,  
And commit my life wholly into your hands.  
Do with me as is best for you,  
For that will be best for me too.  
Whether I live or die, I am with you,  
And you are with me.  
Lord, I wait for your salvation  
And for your kingdom.

still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (vv. 41, 42).

Jesus, who so steeled himself in prayer while asking that the "hour might pass from him," accepted it, saying, "The hour has come," and went out to drink the cup and win the greatest victory ever won. The disciples all failed, and significantly Peter, who fell asleep three times, went on to deny his Lord by that same number—hardly a poetic coincidence! But all was not lost. Their scandal was to become their salvation because in the years to come all came to steel their lives in

prayer. Peter and James died martyrs' deaths, and John was a man of steel who endured to the end. The lessons are here if we wish to see them.<sup>1</sup>

How can our faith better prepare us to handle life's tough times, whether in our personal lives or on the job? How might we steel ourselves so that our faith endures testing? How might a deeper trust in God breed greater confidence in the future? How do we find the peace that passes all understanding and how can we bring this peace to the times when we need it most? These are the questions we need to bring to Advent this year, for yes, "everything is gonna be all right."

## Scott Engle's Bible Classes

### **Monday Afternoon Class**

A study of the book of Exodus

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

### **Tuesday Lunchtime Class**

A study of Ephesians

Meeting on-line at 12:00 noon Tuesday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC".

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like, wear your pj's.-- we're on-line now so who'd even know. Have a Bible handy.

Both classes are now recorded and are available each week in my new podcast at [scottengle.podbean.com](http://scottengle.podbean.com). They are also available on Apple podcasts. Search by my name, "Scott Engle".

### **Scott's Sunday Class**

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Current series: *Seven Books that Rocked the Church*. This week, an eighth book: Christopher Hitchens's *God Is Not Great*

**Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel.** Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, R. K. (1989). Mark: Jesus, servant and savior. Preaching the Word (168–169). Westchester, IL: Crossway Books.