

Mark 14:26-52

Gardens are pleasant places. Whether we speak of a vegetable garden, a flower garden, or a garden of trees and brooks through which one can walk and meditate, we speak of a place that is peaceful; where life springs forth; where everything is lovely.

Yet there is no hymn with the title: “Go To Peaceful Gethsemane.” It’s Dark Gethsemane. This is where we go in the season of Lent. And not because it’s at night when our narrative takes place. We go to Dark Gethsemane because it is here where evil shows its ugly face. While Jesus is praying, Judas is on his way leading a horde of soldiers. They are not coming for a terrorist, yet they come with spears, swords, and clubs as if into a bloody battle. Whatever Gethsemane was before, from now on it will be known as Dark Gethsemane.

But is this so much because of Judas and the soldiers? What they did that night is what was expected of them. The soldiers were simply following orders. And even Judas. He had given himself over to a new leader long before this. Satan had entered him. Though one of the twelve, he was now a pawn of the devil. He had no love for Jesus. His kiss was not one of friendship but one of betrayal.

No, Gethsemane is dark not because of Judas or the soldiers as much as on account of Jesus’ disciples. For what had been light within them now became darkness. They did what was unexpected. They fell away from Jesus. They had promised, just hours before, to be faithful to Him even unto death. But in the face of fear they run away. They forsake the Lord whom they love. No so much as a goodbye kiss. They turn tail and flee.

Where is Gethsemane in your life? Here is the Upper Room where you, like Jesus’ disciples, commune with Him. Here also, as with the disciples, you made an oath. You knelt and swore to be faithful to Jesus, and to His church, even unto death. Here is the Upper Room where we sing hymns, and fellowship with our Lord and each other. But we do not stay here. Jesus led His disciples into Gethsemane that night. And into Gethsemane is where He leads us. And sooner or later there comes into Gethsemane Judas with the soldiers. Temptation comes. Evil comes. The devil comes through friends and foes. And Gethsemane, for us too, can become very dark.

When you’re tested in Gethsemane, do you stay with Jesus? Not me. I fall away so easily. I’m weak, and this is evident. I fail to do the right thing so often. I give in to sinful desires. I forsake my Lord and let the evil one lead me. I turn my back on Jesus and flee. And if you are a sinful human being like me, you act in the same way.

Why is this? Is it not because we fail to do what Jesus asks? “*Watch and pray,*” He says, “*that you may not come into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” And how true. For His disciples cannot do what He asks. They sleep. Their eyes are heavy. While Jesus is praying, they sleep. While Judas is on his way, the disciples sleep. Their spirit wants to do the right thing and watch with Jesus, but their flesh gives in. And so when temptation comes, they forsake their Lord and flee.

Where is Dark Gethsemane in your life? It's where your flesh gives in; where you sleep when you should be watching and praying. It's where you think you're strong enough, but the devil exposes your weakness and you fall and you flee. And for me, this happens daily. Every day you and I go to Dark Gethsemane for every day our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak.

But there is one who did not turn tail and run in Dark Gethsemane, for He was watching and praying. Jesus stood His ground. His disciples forsook Him, but He did not forsake them. And this same Jesus is He who stands His ground for you when your Gethsemane becomes dark.

You and I turn tail and flee. Jesus turns to face the darkness for you. He enters the shadow of death. He gives Himself up to be arrested and tried, to be crucified for you. You and I deserve such punishment, and more, for we are the ones who give in to sin. But Jesus takes your place. And so when you peer into the darkness of Gethsemane, and the darkness of Calvary, you see Jesus looking back at you. He shows you His holy wounds and He says to you, "For you I was wounded, and for you I died. My Father in heaven forgives you. No sin is charged against you."

When Gethsemane becomes dark for you, remember your baptism into Christ. You died and rose again with Him in those waters. He is your light even in your darkest hour. He is always watching and praying for you. Watch, therefore, and pray with Him, for He stands with you, and for you, your dear Lord and Savior. Amen.