

**Preaching Christ....  
...by the power of the Holy Spirit  
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 05 Mar 2023  
Services: *Across the diocese*  
Series: Jesus Christ – death and resurrection  
Title: Mount of Olives  
Passage: Luke 22:39-53

**Outline: The cup  
The request  
Fear for us**

Hi friends my name is Mike and it's a real privilege to be with you in this Lenten series.

Last year one of my children graduated from high school and to celebrate we were able to take a little over a weekend to head to New Zealand for the kind of Adventure holiday that we love - climbing mountains and swimming in glacial lakes that sort of thing.

And the kids and I went to a giant swing which drops you 75 meters in the first three seconds. It was terrifying and that's what we do nowadays because so much of our society is geared around eradicating the sources of fear by keeping us as in control. So now it is possible for us to pay for other people to scare us

Well when we come to this passage that we're reading today from Luke 22, we find Jesus afraid and not afraid in that fun in control but not in control paying someone else kind of way, but genuinely and utterly terrified.

Verse 39 reads *Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place he said to them, "pray that you will not fall into temptation". He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them knelt down and prayed.*

Now there's nothing new for Jesus to go away from the crowds to pray.

In fact it was his usual habit to leave and spend an evening or a whole night in some isolated place just with him and his Heavenly Father.

In this case he went to an enclosed Olive Grove on the side of the Mount of Olives and Luke here describes him as being in such anguish that he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Something has affected Jesus so very deeply so profoundly that he is emotionally crushed.

Nowhere else save perhaps in his very last moment on the cross, do we ever see Jesus so devastated, so broken in his prayers; and what is Jesus praying so earnestly? Verse 42 *Father if you are willing take this cup from me yet not my will but yours be done.*

Understanding this prayer is key to understanding this whole passage. So I'm going to break it out for you in three parts.

### **3. The Cup**

Firstly Jesus asks may this cup be taken from me.

What is he talking about? What is this cup?

Well throughout the scriptures there are passages in which God promises through His prophets that the day will come when he will set right what is broken across the Earth - bringing his kingdom and his justice for all.

This day is the day of God's judgment when he promises to overthrow all who do evil, including in that, all who do evil by failing to rightly honour the one true God who made them and setting everything right.

Jesus - kind loving gentle Jesus - speaks more about this judgment than anyone else does, because judgment is a necessary part of love.

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We don't love if we refuse to exercise justice - that's just indifference!

And about 31 times in the Old and New Testaments, a particular image is joined together with this day of God's judgment. It's the image of a cup. In Psalm 75 we read *in the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices he pours it out and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.*

This image is an image of God's anger against evil. An image of God bringing disaster upon evil itself.

And it is this cup that Jesus prays will be taken from him.

That sounds on the face of it like a strange thing, because if the cup of wrath is God's righteous, holy and perfect judgment upon a rebellious and wicked humanity, we might ask why is this cup before Jesus at all??

After all, even those who don't claim or profess to be Christians, tend to agree that Jesus was extraordinary - even unique - for his goodness his kindness!

And the answer is of course that Jesus - the one true innocent human being - Jesus the Son of God - has stepped up, offering to drink this cup in our place.

700 years earlier the prophet Isaiah had foretold in Isaiah 53 *"He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way, and the lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"*

Jesus has come to carry the wrath - the anger - the justice of God - in our place; to bear our guilt; to stand where we should stand. He has come to drink the cup of all the judgment that every act of evil deserves. It will be poured out on his body the very next day.

## **2. The request**

So, secondly, I don't think it should surprise us or shock us that Jesus asks this cup may it be taken from me.

I think it's hard to avoid the fact that Jesus is asking for a way out of what is to come.

The Cross isn't a card trick.

A real person will be betrayed, abandoned, abused, tortured, beaten, nailed to a post through their very bones and muscle.

A real person will be left to die.

But worst of all, on that day, Jesus who since the beginning of eternity as God's own Son, has been in perfect united loving relationship with his Father, will instead find all of the anger of that same Father for all of the selfish and callous acts of billions of humans, dumped upon him...

...poured out upon him

....flooded over him

....bearing down on him

...so that he and his Father and the Holy Spirit, in perfect unity, might save those same ignorant, unaware humans, even as they carry on in their daily lives.

But now at the crux, if you like, Jesus asks for a way out.

His love for you and I, and his trust in his heavenly father has never wavered, not even for a moment.

He isn't considering abandoning us. He's not bailing out - you see - he says to his Father *let your will be done.*

...Let's continue, he says, in this great plan. Let's save the world. Let's save them, he says. Let's save you and

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me!!

But what Jesus wants to know, in this hour of darkness is, is there any other way?

Is there any other way in which this same goal might be achieved?

Some other way by which these billions might be rescued from their darkness and their damage?

Jesus is asking, isn't there another way?

Couldn't they just be good?

Could they not just pray and go to church?

Couldn't they just go on pilgrimage or give to the poor or offer sacrifices?

Couldn't they just be loving and accepting of one another? - Wouldn't that do??

Isn't it possible, Jesus is asking, that there's some other way to deal with the sins of humanity that doesn't involve the only Son of God - innocent and pure - to be utterly shattered on the cross??

And friends, don't you think that if there were such a way - if there were another way a way which didn't involve the agony of his dear son - don't you think that God would have found it??

It's a poor comparison but when my children were little, we moved into an inner city house that had not been well cared for and the small lawn was full of broken glass. And perhaps inevitably, one day our daughter came home with some glass in her foot and it wasn't like all the other times that we could just pluck it out and send her on her way, but this time it had become infected and it required a visit to hospital. And there at the hospital, the doctor explained to us that because of the location of the wound in the toe, the only way to deal with this infection- to clean it out for sure - was actually to remove the glass to clean the cut and to squeeze out all of the foul juices - all the pus!

And he said that's going to hurt - it will be very painful

And because it was late at night they would need my help. And I've never been able to forget this moment when I stood beside my daughter on a bed and the nurses and I held her down as a doctor squeezed pus out of her toe and she looked at me and between her tears and her cries she said to me 'Daddy please make them stop!'

Please make them stop!

and honestly, if there had been another way I would have!!

I would have gone for anything because seeing her there was breaking my heart - knowing what she was going through. If there was any other way to see her healed, I would have done anything, but what I was doing right then!

And Jesus isn't even suffering just for himself, he's suffering for us!

Don't you think if there was another way; if there was a way that he didn't have to go via the cross and we could still be rescued; don't you think God would, at the drop of a hat, have taken that? He would have intervened at this moment; responded to Jesus' prayer with a different pathway - with a door thrown open?

But he doesn't, because there is no other way!

There is no other way by which you and I can be restored to relationship with God - taken from death to life - washed of our sins and adopted as children - except the only beloved Son of God dying on the cross for us!

Friends, this is why the biblical authors aren't embarrassed to make exclusive claims about Jesus!

You know, I can look and I admire the rich beauty of parts of the Hindi Bhagavad-Gita; I am moved by the

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merits of the lives of my Buddhist friends; I'm challenged by the devotion of my Muslim neighbours; but if there were any other way, but the Cross of Christ, then God would have taken that route!

But Jesus goes to the Cross because there is no other way! As Jesus himself says *I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me* (John 14:6)

And this is why I want to just circle back briefly to something that you may not have noticed.

**3. Fear for us**

See I think we're rightly caught up and moved by Jesus' fear and his anguish in suffering, but it's important for us to notice that Jesus; in the midst of his fear for himself; has room in his love to be afraid for you and for me!

We see this in his fear for his friends.

Twice in the midst of what I can only imagine was the deepest and darkest and most intensive spiritual experiences, Jesus actually takes time out to check on his friends.

At one point, he wakes them up and he instructs them; he pleads with them; he says *pray that you will not fall into temptation.*

You see, as Jesus contemplates the cross, he is afraid of the cross; but at the same time, in his love, he is afraid for us!

Because he is afraid that his friends, under the pressure of this world, faced with hardship, faced with temptation; might walk away from him!

...and so, lose what can be found nowhere else!

Jesus' fear for us, is that we might put our trust or our hope in something that isn't his cross! ...in our own goo deeds and the security of wealth and the pursuit of relationships!

...or perhaps in some other spirituality, which holds out promise - holds out claims - holds out offers and holds out hopes, but because it doesn't call upon the death of the only son of God cannot bring us back to him!

and so friends, as we as we walk towards Easter; this is a time to remember that we walk in the only direction that has hope.....

...that this narrow path on which we tread, is the only pathway into the kingdom of God - into eternal life - into reconciliation with our Father and our Creator...!

...So won't you join with me in prayer...

*Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the gift of your only Son who is our only Way!*

*Help us neither be scared nor allured by the things of this world, but to follow in his footsteps - to put our trust in his death and resurrection and know that we have confidence - know that we have surety - know that we have your promise - that you have given up your Son for us.... because that is what was needed and all that is needed, for us to be brought home to you. In Jesus' name we pray these things, **Amen.***

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