Mark 14:32-41

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”

33 He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated.

34 And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, 37 He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?

38 Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”
even to death; remain here, and keep awake.”

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”

And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.

And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him.

He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Chosen they were, these three. Peter, James, and John. Not long ago, he had led them up a mountain to pray, leaving the others behind. And, there they had seen the brilliant light of God’s love refracting out through him. His face shining like the sun. His clothing like a flash of lightning. And, then enveloped in a cloud, they had heard the very voice of God. Luke says these three were weighed down with sleep. But because they stayed awake, they saw this marvelous sight, they saw his glory. Because they had remained awake as he was transfigured before them.

And, now here they are again. Chosen again by him these three, to follow him to pray. Just as he had chosen them to follow him up the mountain. This time, he leads them more deeply into an olive grove. But the invitation is the same, he beckons them to follow him and to share his most intimate of moments.

There is no brilliant light shining through and around him here. Only darkness. This time, instead of hearing God’s voice, they hear his broken confession, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death.’ His face is not shining like the sun. It is contorted in anguish. There is no flash of lightning white. Rather, they watch him disappear as he wanders further into the black night, alone. This time, when they are weighed down with sleep, they do not stay awake. They do not hear him cry, ‘If it is possible, take this cup from me.’ They do not see him bow his head and say, ‘Your will, Father, not my own.’ They do not see that glory.

How is it that we can experience times in our lives, where Jesus is so very present, so real, so clearly seen in a moment, that we say, ‘I have seen his glory.’ How many times have we said, ‘I shall never forget this moment. It is has changed me forever. I cried to the Lord and the Lord answered me in my distress. I have seen his truth and his grace. And, I will never abandon him, betray him, deny him. I will follow and serve him every day of my life. For I have seen his glory.’

How many times have we then fallen asleep? Asleep, even when we find him prodding us awake, asking us could we not stay awake for even just one hour. How is it that we simply cannot understand that he wants us to stay awake, not out of obligation or duty, not even for him, but for us. Awake so that we might share with him his most intimate of moments. Intimate moments where surely if we stay awake, we shall see his glory. Not only the glory that comes with triumph and joyous song, but the glory that comes in a garden through a dry cry of ‘Your will, Lord, not mine, but yours.’
**These Holiest of Days**

Lent is coming to an end as we enter into these holiest of days. We have become so accustomed to rhythmically following our comforting and predictable traditions that we are mourning their loss. Their loss, yet another symbol of all that we are losing, because we cannot journey with him to the cross, stand before the empty tomb, in the same way. But at the same time, these traditions, because they are so familiar, can also lull us to sleep. Lulled to sleep by the story, because we know it so well.

So, it is my hope that the story just might become more sacred to you, to me, than ever before, because the story shall be stripped of the familiar traditions. More sacred and therefore a gift to celebrate rather than a tradition to mourn. His gift. His question infused with deeper purpose and greater meaning than ever before. For I believe his question to us is rising, stark and shining, in a new way in this solitary time. Rising with hopeful invitation, with joyous challenge. Stripped of rhythm, tradition, his raw and shining gift, his question to us, “Will you stay awake with me?”

I know in these sacred days I will be asking myself how do I see him calling me to stay awake with him during these dark days of Coronavirus? How am I listening for his voice that is beckoning me to share in his most intimate of moments? Is he inviting me to celebrate on a mountaintop or is he asking me to kneel in a garden? How can I be open to seeing his face, his glory, in these dark days? I know that I will sit in the silence in the dark waiting to hear his voice in these days before us. The quiet silence of the dark where in some ways I can better hear him, sense his presence, than being surrounded by the familiar traditions. I hope that you will join me as together we quietly await his coming to us in the darkness of these holiest of days.

And, as I do so, I will be reminded that he tells us, assures us, that dark days are not days that are absent of hope. Rather they are days pregnant with new life. For Jesus tells us that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He tells us we may feel buried in a deep darkness now, but we are also germinating. So, let us all meet in the silence in the dark waiting to hear his voice in these days before us. New life to us, in us, and through us. New life in the moments when surely, we shall see his glory. In his face, his face shining like the sun or bathed in tears.

May it be so for you in these sacred days. May it be so for you in these dark and pregnant days and every day of your lives as he continues to ask us to stay awake with him so that he might then lead us into newness of life. So that then we shall be ready. Ready to bear abundant fruit.

All to his honor, glory, and praise.

Rev. Linda L. McCarty
President & CEO
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