



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Pray that you may not enter into temptation

Luke 22:39-53

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The Christian's life is a transformed life. The life of the Christian looks—or *should* look—dramatically different from the life of the non-Christian. It involves a complete change in priorities. At its most basic level, this is what *repentance* is all about: turning away from everything that is *not* Jesus—our sins, our loves, our hopes, our securities, our priorities—and taking hold of Jesus with both hands in faith so that *he* becomes our love, our hope, our security, our priority. This is what our baptism vows get at. At some point each of us was asked: “Do you renounce the devil and all his work, the empty display and false values of the world, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that you will not follow nor be led by them?” And we answered—or our parents and sponsors answered on our behalf: “I renounce them all.” This is repentance. After taking that vow each of us was baptised, whether by pouring or sprinkling or immersion, God offered us a promise of new life in those waters. As a new life in the Promised Land awaited Israel on the far side of the Red Sea, so a new life in Jesus awaits us the other side of Baptism. And so we passed through those waters in faith, repenting, turning away from everything not Jesus, and taking hold of him in faith. In those waters he washes us clean from sin and pours into us his Holy Spirit, enabling the new life of faith in Jesus.

And yet, the old life with its old sins and its old loves and hopes and securities is still there. The world, the flesh, and the devil call us to come

back. As the road to the Promised Land led through the wilderness, so life with Jesus leads through suffering, persecution, trial, and tribulation. And so Jesus taught his disciples to pray—in the same prayer we pray today—“lead us not into temptation”, or in some translations, “spare us from the time of trial”. In Luke’s Gospel this word for a time of trial or temptation is used several times. He uses it to describe the devil’s temptation of Jesus back at the beginning of the story. The devil met Jesus in the wilderness just after his baptism—just after the Father and the Spirit had confirmed him in his ministry as the Messiah—and the devil whispered into his ear, tempting him to give up that ministry and that mission. Jesus uses the word again in the Parable of the Sower, where he describes seed falling on rocky soil. It grew, but it had no roots and when the hot sun came out the shallow roots shrivelled up—when the time of testing or trial came these hearers of the Good News fell away.

Jesus knew that his people would face their own times of temptation and testing and trial. It’s the natural result of turning away from the world, the flesh, and the devil and, instead, choosing to follow Jesus. But in Luke 22 Jesus has something much more specific in mind. As we’ve seen, Jesus knew that his final showdown with evil was at hand. The Satan would do his worst and Jesus had a sense going into it just how awful it would be. In the Last Supper and in his “farewell discourse” afterward, which we’ve looked at these past two weeks, Jesus has prepared his disciples for what is about to come. Jesus is about to give his life for the sake of his people; he’s about to lead them in a new exodus, not from Egypt this time, but from their bondage to sin and death. And he’s warned them that because they are his friends, they will face hostility. Early in their ministry they could go out to preach the Good News and rely on the hospitality of the people to whom they ministered. Not so anymore. Jesus warns them that

this time they’ll have to look after their own needs—he even talks metaphorically about arming themselves as a way of pointing to the violence—maybe even martyrdom—they may face. But as we’ve seen, all of this is over their heads. He’s talking about being a servant and they’re arguing over who gets to sit in the places of highest honour in his kingdom. He’s talking about metaphorical swords and they’re waving around the two actual swords they’ve got. Jesus ends it all in Luke 22:38 with his exasperated: “Enough!”

We pick up the story this morning at 22:39.

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” (Luke 22:39-40)

Remember that during this final Passover week Jesus was ministering in Jerusalem—specifically in the temple—but he was spending the nights in Bethany, across the Kidron Valley and on the other side of the Mount of Olives. And so, the Passover meal—the Last Supper—being finished, he and the disciples headed back to the place where they were staying. But on the way Jesus stops in the olive groves to pray. Before going off to pray himself, he tells his friends to pray—to pray that that they not enter into temptation or the time of trial.

Again, Jesus knew what was going to happen. When he came to Jerusalem this last time he knew that it was to suffer and die. He knew that Judas had betrayed him to the authorities. They’d been looking for something to pin on him all week and now Judas had given it to them. Jesus undoubtedly knew they would be coming for him that very night—if not in the Upper Room, then in Bethany. He may have stopped to pray in the olive groves in order to spare the

friends with whom he was staying. And he was struggling with what he knew was going to happen. He had his own fears and his own doubts. But what's remarkable is that his thoughts were first for his friends. He needed to sort things out with his Father, but first he asks them to pray. They were about to be swept up in the middle of things. They were about to face their own crisis of faith—and one in which they would abandon him. And so he urges them to pray. Isaiah describes the Suffering Servant being abandoned, but maybe Jesus has misread or misunderstood something. Maybe his disciples would finally wrap their heads around all of his kingdom teaching, maybe they would continue to stand by him in faith, *if* they prayed for stronger faith. Whatever was coming, Jesus *knew* that the prayer was the one essential thing required to weather this storm in faith—both the disciple and himself.

And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:41-44)

Jesus withdraws a short distance to pray in private. Luke says that he *knelt* to pray, giving a sense of just how distressed Jesus is while, at the same time showing how he's truly submitting himself to the will of his Father. It might not strike us as odd that Jesus knelt. Kneeling is our natural posture for prayer, but that wasn't the case for Jews or for early Christians. They stood to pray.

Jesus pleads: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me." Remember the cup from the Passover meal they had just shared. Jesus gave

his disciples that cup of wine and told them that it represented his blood poured out for them—his blood poured out to establish a new covenant. Moses splashed the blood of sacrificed oxen on the Israelites at Sinai to establish his covenant with them; Jesus' blood was now to be poured out to establish a new and better covenant and through it these disciples would be the new Israel, the new people of God. But it was still *his* blood to be poured out. It was *his* death that was involved. And not just his death, but he knew that he was going to be tortured. That was how executions worked in his world. No lethal injections, no firing squads, no hangings, no guillotines. The Jews stoned people to death. The Romans fed them to lions or crucified them.

Jesus knew his mission. He knew that he had been sent to fulfil Israel's mission. Humanity had rebelled against God and so God called Abraham and gave him and gave to his children a mission to be light to the world—to make God known to the nations. Israel was God's representative to humanity. But she refused her mission—she cursed the nations rather than bless them. And so Jesus came as Israel's representative: the Son of Man. He knew that his mission was to take the full force of the punishment Israel deserved—to go into the darkness alone where evil would do its worst to him. Have you ever thought about that? Think of the worst evil you've ever faced. Think of the greatest temptation you've ever faced. Child's play. Friends, at the cross the Satan, evil, sin and death did their *worst*. They threw *everything* they had at Jesus in an attempt to destroy him. Jesus faced the fullness of evil in a way that none of us ever has or ever will face, because at the cross literally *everything* was at stake. And Jesus knew this. Is it any wonder that he pleaded that this cup be taken from him? He knew the Scriptures better than any man before or since, but that night, as his time of trial was

coming, he wondered: Was he reading the Scriptures rightly? Was this the only solution? Could he have missed something? Could there be another way?

And yet, kneeling there in that dramatic posture of submission, he also prayed: "Not my will, but yours be done." I imagine those were the hardest words Jesus ever prayed. Not my will, but yours. In those words he was committing himself to what he knew was going to happen. He was committing himself to walk into the darkness alone and to let evil do its worst. At that point Luke tells us that an angel appeared to strengthen him and with that new strength Jesus prayed even more earnestly. Luke says that Jesus was so fervent in his prayers that his sweat was like drops of blood. Luke says "like". Sweating blood is caused by an exceptionally rare disease, not just stress. Whether Jesus was literally sweating blood or Luke is simply describing Jesus sweating profusely as he wrestles with the knowledge that his own blood is about to be shed, we get the picture. It's an illustration of the agony Jesus was in as he pleaded with his Father—not wanting to face this awful death, but knowing he had to and fighting everything in him that said "No" so that he could submit to the will of the one who sent him. Luke gives us glimpse of Jesus' humanity here. In fact, it's such a profound glimpse of Jesus' humanity that some early manuscripts left out verses 43 and 44, probably because the copyists thought they showed too much humanity. And yet seeing Jesus' humanity ought to be an encouragement to us. He knows what we face because he has faced the worst. As the writer of Hebrews puts it: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

And yet in stark contrast to Jesus we see the disciples. Look at verses 45-46:

And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”

Once again they had no idea what was happening or what was coming—and so, left to pray by themselves, they promptly fell asleep. But Luke goes on:

While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:47-48)

Just as Jesus is trying to drive home for his disciples how important it is that they be prepared the “time of trial” arrives. Luke says that a crowd came marching up the mount. In Luke’s Gospel “crowds” are usually positive—full of Jesus’ supporters. But this crowd is led by Judas, who marches up to Jesus and tries to kiss him.

One other person kissed Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. It was the prostitute in Chapter 7 who washed his feet with her tears and anointed them with expensive perfume. She had kissed Jesus feet. Simon the Pharisees was indignant over that, but Jesus used it to rebuke him. The woman’s kisses were her way of expressing her openness to Jesus—they were, for her, an act of repentance and faith. And so Jesus here stops Judas. His kiss represents not repentance and faith, but rejection of Jesus.

Luke goes on:

And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they

said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

The servant of the high priest is with the crowd—presumably right up front with Judas. The disciples see this and are ready for action. They knew that the chief priests and elders were trying to find something they could use to accuse Jesus of treason and here they come now to arrest him. Finally, what the disciples were hoping for is about to happen: Jesus would finally throw off his disguise as a poor itinerant teacher and bring the revolt that would overthrow the Romans. Jesus had said at dinner that things were about to get hostile and violent. He’d talked about needing to carry swords. They had two of them and now was the time to use them! They never stop to think that two swords will never get them anywhere against a crowd, let alone against Pilate and his army. Maybe they expected that what they started Jesus would miraculously finish. And that’s just what happens, but not the way they thought.

Brothers and sisters, notice the difference between the disciples and Jesus. Jesus had been praying earnestly all evening. They’d been sleeping. Jesus met the crowd calmly and with purpose. They met the crowd ready to fight. He knew his mission. They still had no clue. This is why Jesus tells his people to pray.

They ask Jesus, “Shall we strike with the sword?” But they don’t even wait for him to answer before hacking off one man’s ear. And just as Jesus responded to them earlier when they told him that they were ready with their two sword and he shut them up with his “Enough!”, he does the same again.

But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. (Luke 22:51)

Jesus finished what they started, not by calling down the wrath of God on his enemies, but by healing the man his defenders had injured—a man who was the servant of his enemies, of the men who were about to arrest him and have him put to death. The disciples acknowledge Jesus as Lord, but they haven’t been listening to him, they haven’t understood what he’s said, they haven’t submitted to his lordship. Again, they don’t even give him a chance to respond. They just charge in with swords drawn to bring the kingdom with violence. The healing of the chief priest’s servant is not only a dramatic illustration of the *true* nature of the kingdom—it foreshadows Jesus as he prays for the very men who crucify him—but it’s also a profound rebuke of the disciples and their misunderstanding of everything having to do with Jesus and with his kingdom.

And from the disciples, he turns to the leaders of the mob and rebukes them too:

Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” (Luke 22:52-53)

Jesus brings us full circle, back to his rebuke and upsetting of the temple earlier in the week. When he overturned the tables of the merchants and drove them out, when he declared that the temple had been turned into a den of robbers, he wasn’t so much challenging the merchants and the moneychangers, but the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. They’d perverted the ministry of the temple. Instead of the temple being a light to the nations and a source from which the Lord’s blessing would flow from Israel out to the world, they had turned

the temple into a symbol of their nationalistic ambitions. They offered sacrifices there, but they did it on the backs of widows, orphans, and the poor. And now as the temple leadership comes to Jesus at night with a band of thugs, he reminds them of that earlier rebuke. George Caird puts it this way, “As Jesus points out, this is no legal arrest of a common criminal. The forces of law and order do their work publicly and in the light of day. The darkness is Satan’s realm, and those who do Satan’s business keep Satan’s hours.”¹ They were truly a band of robbers, coming forth from their den—from the temple—under cover of darkness to do the devil’s dirty work. Again, as Jesus knew, evil was preparing to do its worst to him.

Dear friends, as dark as that night was on the Mount of Olives and as agonised as Jesus was over his coming suffering and death, you and I have reason to find hope in these events. In his brutal torture and painful death, Jesus faced the absolute worst that sin and death, that the devil could throw at him. The *worst*. He knew what was at stake. The Cross represents the Satan at the absolute height of his power. Think on that. And then consider that three days later Jesus rose from the dead, bursting forth from the tomb full of life. As St. Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians: “Death is swallowed up in victory!” In the defeat of the Satan and in his resurrection Jesus has begun the work of renewing Creation; he’s begun the work of reversing the corruption unleashed on the world by human rebellion and sin. Brothers and Sisters, Jesus calls us to join him in his ministry of restoring life to the world. Sin and death are all around us. Men and women continue to live in rebellion and to believe the lies of the devil. But Jesus has entrusted us with his light. He calls us to shine it into the darkness of the world’s rebellion—to expose sin, to expose the

devil’s lies, and give the world a taste of the life that Jesus has made possible. In that same passage in 1 Corinthians Paul reminds us that Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection—the first to go where the rest of his people, the rest of us, and the rest of his Creation will one day follow in new life in a new heaven and a new earth.

Again, back to our baptism. We have sworn off the world, the flesh, and the devil and we have taken hold of Jesus in faith. Our hope is in his defeat of sin and death at the cross and the empty tomb and in the new life he offers. And so we pray earnestly, spare us from temptation, spare from the time of trial—asking God to hold us tightly in his grace, strengthening our faith for the battle, strengthening us to face the wilderness of suffering, rejection, persecution, and even the possibility of martyrdom as we proclaim the good news to the world that Jesus is Lord and that his kingdom is breaking into the world. Isaiah wrote that one day “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). Let us pray for the faith to follow Jesus, no matter how difficult the road, until the whole Creation is full of the knowledge of the Lord.

Lord, give your people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.

¹ *Saint Luke* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963), p. 243.