

**“Prayer: Not what we want, but what God wants”**

Matthew 26:35-39

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(Some ideas and quotes drawn from Adam Hamilton's *24 Hours that Changed the World*)

Last Sunday, we shared the meaning of the Last Supper in connection with the Passover Seder. This ritual feast happened on Thursday evening and goes on till midnight. Typically, the Passover gathering ends with singing a hymn. It is called Hallel, a word meaning, “praise” (it is the root of our word “Hallelujah”). The words come from Psalm 113-118. Let me share part of Psalm 118.

It says, “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD; he brought me into a spacious place. The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans. I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.”

I guess that Jesus sang along with his disciples, but on that night, this hymn and lyrics must have echoed differently in his mind. On that late night, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane for prayer. We can easily imagine how heavy his heart was. Our Scripture reading describes it, “He grieved and was agitated.” Let me ask you a question: If you were there as Jesus, what would you pray to God?

This morning, I hope that we find out a deeper meaning of prayer in our Christian faith reflecting on Jesus' prayer at the garden of Gethsemane. First of all, I want to begin with a serious question. Why do we pray? What is your immediate response? Someone defines, “prayer is the breath of the soul.” And prayer includes our thanksgiving and praise to God, and our petitions as well. Prayer is conversation and a way of communication with God. Apostle Paul calls Christian people to pray as a way of life. He says, “Pray without ceasing.” But sometimes, we experience that it is hard to pray when things do not go well. Sometimes, we experience, even though we pray hard to God for the miracles, miracles don't happen as we expect. Then we feel our prayers are not heard and easily think that God doesn't care about us. What does it mean that we pray to God in our faith? I believe that Jesus' prayer at the garden gives us a good example of our attitude in our prayer life.

After the Last Supper, probably it was very late at night. Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane for prayer. He didn't fully enjoy the Passover celebration, because he was afraid and anxious about the next day. He was supposed to die tomorrow. How could he enjoy his last night without praying to God? Our Scripture reading described Jesus' heart in this way, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here and stay awake with me." 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." His drinking from the cup symbolized his sacrifice and concern for the future of his people. With intention and knowledge, he determined to drink from this cup, but this is still fearful to him.

When I was young, I was so confused by this prayer. Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah, then why is he pleading for God to take the cup of suffering from him? It seems that it doesn't make sense that our Savior was in such anguish and fear. It seems that Jesus has lack of courage or lack of faith. Then how can we understand Jesus and his prayer?

Pastor Adam Hamilton, in his book, *24 Hours That Changed the World*, explains Jesus' anguish this way, "Jesus deeply worried about Jerusalem's fate. For saying, if he died, most people would not see him as the Messiah. They would continue to search for another. They would not understand that God wanted them to love their enemies, and they would await a messiah who could lead them in attempting to overthrow the Romans. Thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection, those searching for a military messiah would find a man who would lead them in a war against the Romans. During the period from AD 66 to 73, the Romans would crush the Jewish people, killing over a million Jews and their supporters. Jerusalem would be laid waste. The Temple destroyed. Jesus knew this was in store for the Jewish people if he was crucified." We just imagine whether this worry and concern about his people and country weighed heavily on his heart that night. That was why Jesus chose to pray in the garden of Gethsemane, from which he could look upon the Holy City. In this point of view, we can imagine that in the garden, he grieved not only for himself but also for what would happen to the city. This is a reason that he was meant to drink from this cup.

Jesus wanted to be honest to God. Who would enjoy suffering and death? We confess that Jesus Christ is the divine and at the same time, a full human being. As a natural way, his agony in the garden really shows us how hard a choice he is making for his people's salvation. We seriously should see the burden of his decision, which means he has to endure torture, humiliation,

crucifixion, betrayal from his disciples, and death on the cross. Just think, if you were the Messiah, would you want to feel any fear, worry about any suffering? No one would want to experience suffering. But the more important thing is not about his suffering and death. Jesus wanted to make sure whether this is God's will or not. He prayed to discern whether he is going to take this cup for the sake of God's love for his people. He said in his prayer, "My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." We should focus on this expression when we approach Jesus' sacrifice and death. All he did for his life, ministry and works on earth was to fulfill God's will through his life and death. **Truly, "Not what I want, but what you want" describes the essence of his prayer and this should be our prayer, too.**

We often pray to God projecting our anger, anxiety, fear and our desperate need. That is acceptable to God. But ultimately we lay down our expectations, our desires and our problems before God, admitting that God is in control. Let God be our God and do what God wants for us. Prayer is solely about trust in God, not letting God meet our expectations, but showing our total obedience and complete trust in Him. Prayer is not all about me, but conversation with God that His will be done. In a different sense, prayer is boldness to lay before God our desires and make sure our commitment is to following God's will and doing whatever God calls us to do. It doesn't matter what the cost will be. Our Methodism founder, John Wesley's Covenant Prayer also reminds us of our attitude as Christians. The Covenant prayer begins "I am no longer my own but thine. Put me to what thou wilt..." In other words, "Not what I want, but what you want." Wherever you are in the stages of your life, do not stop praying, but continue to be in touch with God through prayer, and make sure to put your complete trust and obedience in your prayer to God. This simple and humble attitude is our Christian faith and prayer to God. Amen.