

## TFTD L28 Jesus prayed

Today's reading for Holy Week is Luke 22.31-62, and the reflection comes from Rod Hill.



**Luke 22: 31-62:** *Jesus went out, as usual, to the Mount of Olives.*

*<sup>31</sup> ‘Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.’*

*<sup>33</sup> But he replied, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.’*

*<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.’*

*<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus asked them, ‘When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?’*

*‘Nothing,’ they answered.*

*<sup>36</sup> He said to them, ‘But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. <sup>37</sup> It is written: “And he was numbered with the transgressors”<sup>[b]</sup>; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment.’*

*<sup>38</sup> The disciples said, ‘See, Lord, here are two swords.’*

*‘That’s enough!’ he replied.*

*<sup>39</sup> Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed*

*him. <sup>40</sup> On reaching the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you will not fall into*

*temptation.’ <sup>41</sup> He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and*

*prayed, <sup>42</sup> ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but*

*yours be done.’ <sup>43</sup> An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened*

*him. <sup>44</sup> And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops*

of blood falling to the ground.<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>45</sup> When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. <sup>46</sup> ‘Why are you sleeping?’ he asked them. ‘Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.’

### **Jesus arrested**

<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, <sup>48</sup> but Jesus asked him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’

<sup>49</sup> When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, ‘Lord, should we strike with our swords?’ <sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

<sup>51</sup> But Jesus answered, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

<sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, ‘Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour – when darkness reigns.’

### **Peter disowns Jesus**

<sup>54</sup> Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. <sup>55</sup> And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. <sup>56</sup> A servant-girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, ‘This man was with him.’

<sup>57</sup> But he denied it. ‘Woman, I don’t know him,’ he said.

<sup>58</sup> A little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ ‘Man, I am not!’ Peter replied.

<sup>59</sup> About an hour later another asserted, ‘Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.’

<sup>60</sup> Peter replied, ‘Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!’ Just as he was speaking, the cock crowed. <sup>61</sup> The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times.’ <sup>62</sup> And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Oh, this is an interesting passage, there is so much in it, isn’t there?

Much of it, of course, is familiar to people who have attended church for years or read the gospels frequently, but amongst all of the familiar stuff Luke gives us some

fascinating tiny details, and it's to some of those details that I want to draw your attention now.

There's all the familiar stuff about Simon Peter, like Jesus praying that his faith may not fail (what's that about? Of course, we know because of what follows, but what would Simon Peter have made of it?). Then there's Jesus' prediction about Peter's denial, and then the passage moves from the singular (Jesus speaking to Peter) to the plural: "Jesus asked **them**" whether they lacked anything when he sent them out. What a total non-sequitur!

And then another, "See, Lord, here are two swords." "That's enough, he replied." Enough for what?

And then there is all the very familiar stuff about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. There's the stuff about Jesus praying that God might take the cup away from him. There's good material for any preacher here but, so familiar are we with this that we often miss the tiny details that Luke gives "Jesus went out **as usual** to the Mount of Olives, where he told the disciples to pray and where he prayed himself.

Is Luke telling us that this is Jesus' normal practice during this Holy Week? That he usually went out to the Mount of Olives to pray?

There's the story of Peter's denial, again very familiar to many of us and again plenty of stuff for a preacher to get to grips with,

I wonder if you've ever been to the Mount of Olives and the gardens of the Olive Press (that's what Gethsemane means, I'm told, in English translation)? It's a fascinating place. At the top you've got the chapel commemorating Jesus' teaching of the Lord's Prayer, and just a little distance away the reputed site of his ascension.

Then you come further on down the mount, facing Jerusalem, and there are just rows and rows of graves of Jewish people who, apparently, pay a small fortune to be buried overlooking Jerusalem.

And the, on the other side of the path, there is the chapel known as Dominus Flevit, marking the point where Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

At the very bottom is a garden containing olive trees, reputed to be so old that they could be the very olive trees that were there in Jesus' time, and a little way off is the 'Church of all Nations.'

It is said that before his arrest by the Romans, Jesus prayed at the foot of the Mount of Olives, on a section of the bedrock in the Garden of Gethsemane. Like other sites on Jesus' path to the cross, throughout much of the ensuing period, this rock was enshrined by a succession of Christian places of worship. Among these were a 4th-century Byzantine basilica that was destroyed by an earthquake in the year 746 CE, and a 12th-century Crusader chapel that was abandoned in 1345.

Since 1924, the Church of All Nations (officially named the Basilica of the Agony) has rested on the foundations of these earlier churches.

Inside, the focus of the church is the bedrock, which is surrounded by a crown. Like other chapels built by the Italian architect, Antonio Barluzzi around the 'land we like to call holy,' it tries to capture the essence of the Gospel story that took place there – Jesus agonising in prayer before God.

The Church of All Nations, or the Church of the Agony, commemorates Jesus agonising before God about the cup of suffering that was to come. But what if this is the place to which Jesus was accustomed to come and pray? What if Jesus and the disciples had come here every evening during Holy Week?

The story moves on again, back to all the familiar stuff about Peter's denial and in amongst it 'The Lord looked at Peter,' as if (perhaps) to say, I prayed for you, Peter! Fascinating little details that Luke gives us.

But I'm haunted by that phrase Jesus went out, *as usual*, to the Mount of Olives. It was usual for Jesus to go to the mount of Olives – in Holy Week, or always, we can't tell.

The gospels, it seems to me, paint it as quite usual for Jesus to take time to draw aside and pray, so there's nothing at all unusual in this happening during Holy Week. Jesus prayed!!!! It's a natural thing to do.

And, if Jesus prayed, should we not do so too, especially this Holy Week?.

And notice, too, v31, Jesus doesn't tell Simon Peter to do the praying that he might not fall into temptation, he says "*I have prayed for you, Simon...*"

We're not on our own in this praying thing. Somehow (don't ask me how) Jesus also prays for us. Isn't that fantastic? Jesus not only prays for Simon, but also for us. It

doesn't all depend on us!

So, as we journey through this Holy Week, let us keep our eyes focused on Jesus, who ever prays for us.

Amen

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