

Dear Friends,

Mark 14: 32-35

It's the end of a long day. The friends of Jesus are feeling weary and are ready for sleep. They go with Jesus to Gethsemane where there's a small orchard of olive trees. Olives and mercy somehow go together. In the days of Noah, the first sign that the flood had receded and the land could be seen again was when a dove flew back to the ark carrying an olive leaf. When the Good Samaritan found a man, who had been beaten and left half dead, one of the things he did for him was to pour soothing olive oil on his wounds. Will Jesus find mercy in this olive grove? Will his friends show him mercy? Will God be merciful to him?

He tells his friends to sit down and pray. He forms a group with Peter, James and John. They had been with him in some special moments, like when he raised the daughter of Jairus from death to life or when they heard the voice of God speak to them on the mountain of transfiguration. All three of them had insisted that they were ready to suffer with him. Now is their chance to prove it.

We are shown the suffering of Jesus in a number of different ways. The story teller describes his anguish by saying that he's "distressed and agitated". We see it in his body language when he throws himself on the ground. We hear it in his words when he says "I am deeply grieved, even to death". His heart is overwhelmed with grief. His sorrow is so great it almost crushes him. His words could be translated, "I am deeply grieved, I would rather be dead".

He feels inner torment at the thought of what lies ahead. He is preparing to be tortured and put to death. He is getting ready to experience physical suffering and pain that will be excruciating. He knows that he will go through this agony alone. His friends will fail to be there for him. He has been teaching them for ages, but they still have very little understanding of him. One of them is betraying him. The rest are about to desert him. Even now, in this moment when he's feeling such deep anguish, they are unable to be there for him. They just go to sleep. Maybe part of his pain is caused by the thought of what his friends will experience. They will be overwhelmed with fear as their whole world is devastated. His own ordeal is terrible, but he perhaps also thinks of what his friends will endure and his responsibility for it.

Jesus had said to his friends, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid". But in this moment, we can see how troubled his own heart is and yes, we can see that he is afraid. He nevertheless shows courage, because courage is not a way around fear, it is a way into and through fear. It is not being unafraid. It is being afraid and doing what has to be done anyway.

In these extreme circumstances, Jesus knows where to turn and what to do. He turns to God and prays.

God bless you,

Tony