

Dear Friends,

Mark 14: 38-42

Jesus has asked his friends to sit with him while he prays. They however, have fallen asleep. So, he asks them again to "keep awake and pray". He tells them to pray that they "may not come into temptation, into the time of trial".

Have you noticed the echoes of The Lord's Prayer in this story? That prayer begins with "Our Father". In Gethsemane Jesus called God his "Abba Father". He taught the disciples to say "Thy will be done". He says, "Yet not what I want, but what you want". He taught them to say "Lead us not into temptation". Now he tells them to pray that they "may not come into temptation". The truth is that the time of trial has already come upon them. It's not really a prayer to avoid temptation. That comes to everyone. It is a prayer that when we face the time of trial, we will not be overwhelmed, we will be given the strength to withstand and overcome temptation.

And we are urged to wake up and see how big this time of trial is. It is about wrestling with those things which are within. It is about asking Jesus to storm the hell in you and break your beasts. But it is also about wrestling with those things which are without. The hunger for more which makes us devastate the creation and threatens our survival. The lack of reverence for people that means some are not treated with the dignity they deserve. The lack of justice that stops us from fairly sharing our resources. If we cannot stay awake and pray for one hour, what hope have we of enduring these challenges. May God save us from being overwhelmed by the time of trial. May God strengthen us to withstand and overcome temptation.

Jesus can see the inner turmoil in his friends. There is a wrestling match going on inside of them. He describes it in this way, "The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak". Verses like this have sometimes led people to have a negative attitude towards the flesh, towards the human body and human appetites. That's not the intention. Remember that John's gospel says this about Jesus "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth". By coming in human flesh, Jesus shows us the dignity, beauty and goodness of the body.

The contrast Jesus is seeing here is between that within his friends which is willing and that within them which is unwilling. There is that within them which wants God and is open to God; which is eager and predisposed to say "Yes" to God; which quickly says, "I freely and whole heartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal". By contrast, there is also that within them which does not want God; which is closed to God; which resists and says "No" to God; which says "I yield nothing to your pleasure and disposal".

Maybe you see this inner turmoil within yourself. Well, do not be afraid. The risen Jesus goes before you. He is already at work in you, dismantling the resistance, strengthening the willingness. The new and right Spirit that God gives you is the Holy Spirit, the same powerful Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. As Paul writes, "If the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ

from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you”.

Three times Jesus told his friends that he would suffer; three times he showed his confidence in eternal life; but they did not understand him. Now they have failed to watch and pray three times, on each occasion Jesus has found them sleeping. Soon, Peter will deny that he knows Jesus three times.

And now, the moment has arrived. Jesus sees Judas coming towards him and he is not alone, with him is a crowd of people. They are carrying swords and clubs. They are armed and ready. Jesus is fully awake. He knows what this will mean for him. He knows what it will mean to say “yes” to God. He has been feeling distressed and agitated, but he has faced that fear and is ready to go through it. To his friends he says, “Get up. Let us be going”.

God bless you,

Tony