

Jesus is stressed and prays for God to not make him do what God is calling him to do. Jesus is stressed and prays for God to make things easier for him. This Jesus asking for an easier route to obedience is not the image which we share very often to ourselves and the wider world. But maybe we Christians need to start telling the messier stories of our faith that challenge our perfectly created world of what Jesus is like, what God is like, and what we Christians are supposed to be like.

Before I say anything else about this portion of Scripture I have to share with you why this particular verse is very important to me. And because of my personal experience with this Scripture I will always read it with this one particular experience in my mind.

Almost 5 years ago I was given the gift of being able to go to Israel. This trip was sponsored by a foundation in Atlanta working through Columbia Theological Seminary. The purpose of the trips to Israel was to help mid-career pastors visit the Holy Land and receive revitalization for ministry.

When I left for Israel, I was in a particularly dark place in my ministry. I went to Israel with serious questions about my life and what God wanted for me in my life. I left with questions in front of me about whether or not I should continue in ordained ministry.

That trip was a blessing because I was with a group of about 20 pastors who allowed me to raise the deep questions that I needed to raise for myself and God. I was allowed to vent my anger at God in the desert wilderness and not be told that this was not acceptable. I developed friendships with folks I still am in contact with today. Yes, there are good things to Facebook.

But what leads me to today's passage is that one of the places we were able to visit was the Garden of Gethsemane. Yes, the same garden of olive trees that Jesus visited in today's scripture. Like many Christian groups before us and after us, we disembarked from our tour bus outside the walls of the Garden of Gethsemane. Today you walk through the walls and you find about 20 or so olive trees that are blocked off so that you cannot tear off pieces of these trees and destroy them. A couple of the trees have huge trunks and are supported by concrete supports. These trees are over 2000 years old so they would have been present during the days when Jesus prayed in this garden.

Like I shared, the garden is surrounded by a wall that is about 4 feet high. I found myself sitting on this wall and peering to the one side of the wall at the city of Jerusalem. On the other side of the wall were these olive trees included some that dated back 2000 years. So I found myself in the Garden of Gethsemane praying in this site where Jesus once prayed.

The prayer that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane is the prayer that makes many people uncomfortable. In this garden, Jesus prayed for God to remove this cup from him. Jesus prayed a deep and passionate prayer to God for God to spare him of the pain that he was about to endure. Many would look to this as a sign of weakness from Jesus.

But what Jesus' prayer gave me was the courage to pray the same prayer that Jesus prayed. And so while I sat on that wall, I prayed for God to lead me to a different place. I prayed for God to open up the doors and lead me to a different place. I was not sure where that place was going to be. But I prayed for God to show me the path that I was to take in my life.

While I sat on that wall in the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed for God to show me the direction I was to go, I felt a wet hand upon my arm. I opened my eyes to find the face of one of my fellow travelers. She then shared with me with tears in her eyes to remember my baptism and to remember my calling.

I asked Sarah later why she did this. She said, "I don't know." She said she was walking along and she saw a spigot of water and felt that she was to put her hands under the water and to share with me what she shared. Now maybe this is all coincidence. It was after all just a spigot of water protruding from the side of a building used for keeping olive trees alive. But for me it was not coincidence.

For me it is proof that Jesus gives us courage to pray the prayers which are deep and unnerving. Prayers which say, "You know what God. I am confused. I don't know which direction to go. I am not perfect. I really do not want to do what you seem to be telling me to do.

I have been reading the book, "The Gifts of Imperfection" by Brene Brown. In this book she tells about an example of ordinary courage at her son Charlie's preschool. Parents were invited to attend a holiday music presentation put on by the kids. 25 kids singing with 50 plus parents and grandparents and siblings in the audience wielding all of their video cameras. In addition to all of the commotion, one 3 year old girl cried her way through the entire performance because she couldn't see her mom from the stage. As it turns out, her mother was stuck in traffic and missed the performance.

After the performance was over, the mother burst through the door and immediately started to scan the room to find her daughter. Another woman walked by this distressed mother, shook her head, and rolled her eyes with that better than you attitude. But then two other mothers walked over to this stressed and belated mother. One of them put her hand on top of the woman's shoulder and said, "We've all been there. I missed the last one. I wasn't just late. I completely forgot." The distressed woman's face began to soften.

The second woman then shared, "my son was the only one who wasn't wearing pajamas on PJ day and he still tells me it was the most rotten day of his life. It will be ok. We are all in the same boat." By the time this mother made it to the back of the room where the teacher was still comforting her daughter, the mother now looked calm. Her 3 year old daughter then lunged out for her.

According to the woman who observed all of this take place, she said “the moms who stopped and shared their stories of imperfection and vulnerability were practicing courage. They took the time to say, ‘Here’s my story, you are not alone.’” They did not have to stop and share; they could have easily joined the perfect parent parade and marched right by her. But instead, they recognized her imperfection by sharing their own imperfection.”

The most perfect human being and the one and only son of God that has ever walked the face of this earth shared with his God that he was stressed, confused, and wanted things to go a little bit easier for him. He asked for his closest friends to be with him during this time of anguish and they fell asleep.

We do not have to be perfect. We do not have to wallow in self pity. If Jesus can pray to God that he fears that he can’t cut it and that he is not strong enough to do what God wants him to do, then we are given permission to pray to God our fears that we can’t cut it and that we may not be strong enough.

And when we honestly pray that prayer to God, then maybe like Jesus we will get a reassurance from God that it will be ok. AMEN.

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-Brown, Brene, The Gift of Imperfection, p. 16

-Text: Mark 14:32-50

-Given: March 11, 2012 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)