

Title: Letting Jesus Down

Mark 14:32-42

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."
33 He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated.
34 And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake."
35 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." 37 He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? 38 Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. 41 He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

We need Jesus. We need Jesus to be our Lord – the one who directs our lives. We need Jesus to be our Savior – to buy us out of our bondage to sin and death. We need Jesus in so many ways that we can easily say.

We even need Jesus as a friend... or at least we are more grateful than we can say that Jesus IS our friend!

But in this story, it is Jesus who is in need. Jesus needs his friends. He needs them to be close. He needs them to be present.

Jesus doesn't need them to do something for him. He needs them to be with him.

We really underestimate the importance of presence, especially with people who are hurting. When someone is hurting we tend to think, "Well I don't know what to do to fix the situation, so I will stay away." Other people's suffering is hard for us to take, so we instinctively step back and give them space when what they really need to know is that they are not alone. That is what Jesus needed of his friends. That is what hurting people need from us.

Illustration – me as a chaplain sitting in silence with the family for an hour, saying nothing, and at the end the daughter thanked me profusely "for all I had done."

When we choose to be with hurting people instead of trying to fix them or their circumstances, we honor their humanity and embody Christ to them.

Everyone's humanity is on full display here. Jesus, in his humanity, is honest with his Father, his Abba: I do not want to do this. If there is another way, then I want that. But if this is the way it

has to be, I accept it. I trust you, Dad. Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, is descending into the depths of human suffering in order to accomplish the divine plan for salvation and redemption.

A critically important part of the gospel story is that Jesus is just like us. He experienced fear, and doubt, and longing... just like us. And he needed other people, just like we do. That isn't weakness, it's being real. Jesus was a really real person. Can God really understand how hard it is to be human, to go through what we go through, and experience the way we hurt each other and let each other down? Yes. Yes, God can.

The disciple's humanity is also on full display. It's probably 10 or 11pm, on the night of Passover. They have stayed up late on Passover every year of their lives. But I can't help but imagine that the stress has overwhelmed them. We all have physiological responses to stress, and one typical response is get really sleepy. I can relate to this... once after a car accident I got home, walked to the couch, laid down, and went right to sleep for several hours. I really feel for Peter, James and John here. They want to be there for Jesus, but can't. Maybe they are just overwhelmed.

Have you ever felt like you let God down? What did that feel like? What do you wish you had done differently? What do you imagine God saying to you about that experience?

All three of disciples let Jesus down, but Peter – through Mark's telling of the story – wants us to know that he, in particular, let Jesus down. And Jesus was hurt by this. It mattered. Jesus addresses him as Simon in this moment. Peter isn't being the Rock for Jesus that Jesus needs him to be. And Jesus is both disappointed and concerned. He is disappointed they couldn't stay awake with him, but he is also concerned that, if they can't stay awake in the garden, how will they face the trials that coming next?

And yet, Jesus isn't mad. He is compassionate. He knows they wanted to be there for him. He knows our spirits are willing but our bodies are frail.

We've all probably heard the expression, "failure is not an option." It's what we say when we want to set our minds on success and harden our resolve to accomplish our goals. Sometimes, it helps. If we are really trying, I agree that failure is not an option. It is an inevitability. Sooner or later, we are going to fail. We are going to let other people down and let ourselves down. The real question is, what will we do with that failure? Will we stay stuck in it, or bring it back to God? Will we walk away with our heads down in shame, or will we admit that we blew it, ask for forgiveness, and try again.

Jesus still needs us to be present. Perhaps Jesus put this most starkly to us in his description of the final judgement in Matt 25. That is where Jesus describes how he will one day come in glory as a king. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates sheep and goats. To those who showed even the smallest acts of mercy to hurting

people – a glass of water to the thirsty, a visit to the sick and imprisoned – they will be welcomed into the kingdom.

“And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

(Matt 25:40)

This week, reach out to someone whom you know is hurting. Don't try to fix their situation. Spend some time with them, listen to them, pray for them.

Jesus does need us. Now. He still needs us to walk with him out into the world that he loves, that he gave his life for, and that he is even now working to redeem.

We come to the Table, and when we do we are invited to put ourselves in the story of that night... the night Jesus loved us fully to the very end.