

“RISKING TEMPTATION”

The Rev. Victor Kim

Mark 14:32-50

(03-28-21) Lent 6

Today is what is traditionally known as Palm Sunday. And as I said in the time with young Christians, this would normally be a day when our children would parade down the centre of the church with their palm branches waving, shouting their hosannas as we sing about Jesus entering Jerusalem those many years ago. We're not doing that for two reasons. First, obviously due to the pandemic, we are still not meeting in person at the church. It's been a long time, too long, it will be two Easters next week, and we all long for a return to in person worship. It will happen, but not just yet. The other reason is that we have been on a Lenten journey this year, following an outline from the book, *Entering the Passion of Jesus*, by Professor A.J., Levine. This is a book that many Presbyterians across our land have been reading this year during Lent. In our study of this book, we began Lent with the traditional Palm Sunday text, with Jesus entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey to a chorus of hosannas. For the past six weeks, we have been journeying with Jesus during the last week of his life before his death and this week we find ourselves with him in a place called Gethsemane.

We often refer to it as the Garden of Gethsemane and that comes from the different gospel accounts of the story. Our text this morning simply says that Jesus and his disciples went to a place called Gethsemane, which is Aramaic for “oil press.” It's John's gospel that says that Jesus and his disciples went to a place across the Kidron valley where there was a garden. Eventually we came to call that place the Garden of Gethsemane. Sophie and I were in such a garden when we visited Israel a couple of years ago. It's a beautiful garden, with very old olive trees and well-worn paths from all the pilgrims who have walked there. You can see the walls of old city of Jerusalem and though all you see today is the top of the Dome of the Rock, which is an Islamic shrine, you can well imagine the top of the temple being visible from the garden back in the day of Jesus. Whether it is the exact same garden as the one Jesus was in is impossible to know, but it felt like we must have been close.

The way Mark tells the story, when Jesus had finished the supper with his disciples he went out to the garden to pray and he took with him Peter, James and John. And the text says that Jesus began to be distressed and agitated. These aren't words we often associate with Jesus. He's always in control, calm, emotionally centered. He's not supposed to be distressed or agitated. But why wouldn't Jesus be these things? He knows what's happening, he knows what awaits him. He's deeply grieved, even to death. He throws himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, that the hour might pass from him. Remove this cup from me, yet, not what I want, but what you want.

Jesus prays to his Father, to Abba, for you all things are possible, even removing this cup, removing what it is that lies before me. A.J. Levine writes, praying not to die is a very good prayer. Who would pray such a prayer? Perhaps people such as firefighters, police officers, soldiers on active deployment, these days it could be front line health care workers, nurses, doctors, those caring for people in senior's homes, long term care centres, those working to help fight and manage the pandemic in all the various ways people do.

Let this cup pass from me; I don't want to die! But it's remarkable that these people still go to work, day after day, because it's their vocation, it's what they do. You have to respect and admire people, who know that their lives are at risk, and yes, we do our best to minimize those risks as much as possible, but still, there's risk involved. But for Jesus it's a whole different level altogether, isn't it? It's precisely that he could minimize the risk, he could eliminate it, he could have walked away. He could have mobilized his supporters to fight the authorities, in fact one of his disciples drew his sword and cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest. Imagine if Jesus called on the crowds that shouted Hosanna to mobilize, imagine if Jesus were to call on his supporters to fight for him. Or, what if Jesus called in the heavy artillery? Just one call, just a simple prayer could have unleashed the host of heaven on his opponents. But the fact is that while Jesus could have saved himself, he chose not to do so. It's the biggest risk of all!¹

Remove this cup from me, yet, not what I want, but what you want. Jesus knows what awaits him. Betrayal, arrest, trial, mocking, suffering, crucifixion, death. The temptation to avoid it must have been so strong. That's why the gospel says that he was distressed and agitated, deeply grieved. Jesus' ministry begins with temptation, in the wilderness after his baptism. He's tempted when he is hungry and weak, tempted to take the easy way out, tempted to work from within the system. But he resisted temptation at the start and he will find the strength to resist it once again here at the end. Yet, not what I want, but what you want. Jesus instructs his disciples to pray that they would not be led into temptation and he walks the talk, he practices what he preaches. He is faithful to who he is. He is faithful to his vocation, as Saviour, as Messiah, as the love of God embodied, made incarnate.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "To love is to become vulnerable, to risk suffering. If you want to make sure your heart is not broken, you must give your heart to no one, to nothing. Then, it will not be broken. Indeed, it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable." Jesus resisted the temptation to walk away, to protect himself, because of love, because he is love, because of his love for us.

"God in Jesus, who is love, was willing to risk great suffering, willing to risk betrayal and denial and desertion, willing to risk mocking and misunderstanding. There has been no pain greater

¹ A.J. Levine, *Entering the Passion of Jesus*. p.134

than what God's love can bear. God does not regret the price of love. Such vulnerability is perfect love."²

We face temptation all the time, don't we! It doesn't matter what the temptation may be, and there are all kinds. Money, fame, power, beauty, sex, security, health, and so much more. But it boils down to the same thing, will we be faithful to who we are meant to be? The choices we make around temptation all determine whether we will be the people that God intends us to be or whether we will chase after other gods, chase after idols of our own making, of the world's making.

I've been very impressed and moved by the Lenten testimonials around risk that we have watched over the past few weeks. We have heard amazing stories of faithfulness amid risk, testimonies of how people have risked to live out who they believe they have been called to be. I know that the testimony that John Beatty gave this week is another story that moves us and touches us deeply. I appreciated John's story of risk, how he had to risk disappointing his parents around the path for his education. I can imagine the anxiety and stress around trying to imagine a future around engineering, then being confronted with a textbook full of math and knowing for sure, this just isn't going to work! It was risky to make such a change in direction, a change which would lead to many other changes in his life, but in the end, John had faith that his parents would support him, and they did.

As we come to the end of our Lenten journey, as we journey through Holy Week, as we draw closer to the pain of Good Friday and the joy of Easter Sunday, I wonder what may have changed for you, for us? I wonder about our willingness to risk, our openness to risk as disciples of Jesus. I know, like Peter, James and John, we will fail Jesus and too often he will find us sleeping on the job, but I also know that our Father, will support us, restore us, heal us and love us.

We need to be faithful to who we are, to the people God has created us to be. It is to live with vulnerability, to live with integrity, to live with a willingness to follow in the way of Jesus, to risk for the sake of love. The temptation is to protect ourselves, to shield ourselves from suffering, from pain, from vulnerability. As C.S. Lewis said, we can protect our hearts and make them unbreakable, impenetrable and irredeemable, or we can risk, we can risk because the most decisive decisions in life are always rooted in love.

What do you love? Who do you love? Are you, are we, willing to risk for the sake of love, to be able to join with Jesus is praying, not my will, but yours be done? Let me leave you with the good news. Jesus risked it all for the sake of his love, his love for us. It led to his betrayal, his suffering, his crucifixion and death.

² Rev. Dr. Laura Mendenhall, Day 1, 2000

But it also led to the empty tomb, to resurrection, to the victory of life over death, light over darkness, the victory of love. In our risking we have to realize that we need to go through Friday to get to Sunday, that at times there will be pain, there will be hardship, there will be suffering, because vulnerability leaves us open to all of that, but the hope of our faith is that only a broken heart knows the gladness of healing, only the vulnerability of risk can know the great joy of reconciliation and renewal.

May our prayer join with Jesus, Abba, Father, not what we want, but what you want.
Thanks be to God, Amen.