

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Midweek Lent Service -- March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014



### **Luke 22:39-44**

**Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.**

Dear Children of God,

This is a scene that has been played out in many families. Families plant gardens in their backyards. For some, these gardens are very large and for others any size in-between. Summer gardens are all around. The ground is turned over either by hand or maybe by a rototiller. The rows are marked off and measured so that you can walk between the rows and hoe the weeds when they come. If you are really organized, maybe you fix the empty seed packets to a stake at the end of each row to identify what was planted there — just in case you forgot what you planted. But how many of us can relate to the next step. As the summer progresses, you get busy or a little disinterested in the garden. Your enthusiasm has tapered off a little. The garden was neglected. By August, the garden has become so thick with weeds it is hard to discern if any good plants had grown among the many weeds. The only way to salvage whatever vegetables might be entangled in that mess is to get down on your hands and knees for hours and weed the whole thing by hand. This is a good lesson on how God had cursed the ground in the Garden of Eden.

But more than weeds have sprung up from the Garden of Eden. Because of Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience, sin sprang up from that garden. From sin sprang death, suffering, sadness, damnation, God’s stern disapproval with our sin, and Satan’s dominion. These poisonous weeds flourished and completely smothered whatever life God originally intended for us. There was no salvaging it. Every weed would have to be pulled up and destroyed, lest it spread and regain its stranglehold.

Jesus eradicated all the weeds by becoming one of us and taking our place. He allowed himself to be choked, as it were, by all of the weeds together. Today we read of another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane. In this garden we clearly see Christ’s true suffering. We might call it the Garden of Passion.

### **Theme: The Garden of Passion**

- 1. This Garden brought suffering for Jesus**
- 2. This suffering was necessary for our salvation**

When we hear the word passion, what do we think? Passion means “suffering.” We just read from Luke chapter 22. Did those words make you think of suffering? Listen again and I want you to think more closely about the word suffering, **“Jesus withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them,**

**knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”**

This suffering we are talking about was in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before Jesus suffered on the cross, but we can see that this passion or suffering was already rearing its ugly head.

Have you ever sat down and thought about this fact? Jesus suffered knowing what was going to happen to him. Does death frighten you or at least make you uncomfortable? Sometimes it makes us feel uncomfortable or even afraid because death is not natural. We were not created to die. We were created to live. Death is the opposite of God’s original intention for us. That’s what makes death so horrifying to us. Imagine how much fear or apprehension you’d feel if you knew your death was coming tomorrow morning. Imagine if you were going to have to go through that experience over and over and over again. That is what was facing Jesus. Jesus was going to have to die in place of all people of all time—innumerable deaths all at once. How appalling! How revolting to the Author of Life! Prior to this he had never known death. It would be a first-time experience for him too!

It’s bad enough that death is frightening. It would be even worse if death were bitter or unfair. What if you had to die unfairly? Let’s say you were accused of a crime. You knew the guilty party, but they were released and you were held for the death penalty. Doesn’t it frustrate or bother you when someone blames you for something you didn’t do? Don’t we often do anything possible to clear our name in the eyes of others? Imagine how much more bitter Jesus’ death must have been, since he was blamed for everything that everyone else ever did wrong. It wasn’t just another person blaming Jesus but God the Father: God’s infinite white hot anger focused only on Jesus. Though Jesus could have claimed innocence, God was not understanding or lenient. God the Father came down hard on Jesus and allowed no justification, no excuse. For Jesus it had to be truly a bitter death.

There was no way out for Jesus, since God’s plan was to uproot sin and death from the whole world. His plan was to give us life. As God the Son, only Jesus could be everyone’s substitute. Only he could endure such suffering and shoulder such immense responsibility. Only he could carry such a heavy weight, sink so low, and still come out on top. In the Garden of Gethsemane, we see the uncompromising will of the Almighty and the colossal momentum of the world’s guilt in a gigantic collision crushing down on a frail human body.

Feel sorry for Jesus? Please don’t. He wouldn’t want you to. And that’s not the point of observing his great suffering. Sweat as great drops of blood was not a sign of Christ’s unwillingness but of his resolve. That is why the angel arrived to bolster him so he could finish the job. Only by suffering in the flesh could Jesus rescue all flesh from suffering. Only his bodily death would force death to release our bodies forever. Only if God the Son were punished as a human could all humanity be set free from God’s punishment. Only if our sins were placed on the Son of Man could the sins of all mankind be atoned for.

## **2. This suffering was necessary for salvation**

Back to the picture of a garden. Come August, we might be sad and quite frustrate or angry to see what has become of our garden. Tugging at weeds is hard and not a very fun job. But we do have the good feeling of knowing that this work will benefit us in the long run as the garden produces things to eat. Christ suffered not for himself but for you and me. But don’t feel sorry for him. Understand that

his most earnest desire, his very difficult effort, and terrible pain was for our benefit. Don't feel sorry for him. Be appalled at how impossibly "weedy" our existence had become that it required this degree of difficult work for him to free us from it all. Be grateful, more than words can say, that he would consciously, intentionally go to it for you.

On Jesus, all the "weeds" — sin, death, damnation, sorrow, Satan's power — have run their course. They did their worst on him. But the cross was the end of their growing season so that now they are nothing but dried, lifeless remnants blown away by the wind or tossed into a bonfire. Through faith in Jesus we are planted in a new garden, a weedless garden, an evergreen, always blooming garden. Trusting in him, our sins are forgiven. Death is gone. Sorrow is turned to joy. Satan has no power over us. Hell is forced to release its claim on us. God has nothing but the friendliest, most loving goodwill toward us. The weeds are gone. Life is renewed unhindered, unhampered, and uninterrupted.

Sometimes we're struck with an alarming realization: The roots of our sins run pretty deep. We can try to yank them out and change for the better, but the root is still there. It keeps coming back. Sometimes we are secretly alarmed at ourselves—how grotesque or how terrible or how often repeated our personal sins are. We never dare to tell another living soul. It's too embarrassing, too painful. No one would ever look at us the same again if they knew. But look again at Christ, your Savior, in the Garden of Passion. Look at the intensity of his suffering. Remember, that was just the beginning of his suffering! Be assured, from there he proceeded to the cross, and he suffered such severity as to more than make up for your worst, most embarrassing, most often repeated sins. He suffered such hellish depths of God's divine rage—he the very Son of the eternal God—so that his atoning payment to God on your behalf is infinitely greater than your sin. That's why the apostle Paul was able to write, and why you can say right along with him, **"For that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life"** (1 Ti 1:16). In Christ, you are forgiven! Completely forgiven! Even for those unspeakable sins at your root and core—forgiven!

See Jesus in this dreadful Garden of Passion. Be appalled at his suffering for our sake. Then cherish his suffering as our dearest treasure, and love him more than we can say with words! Amen.