Sermon based on St. Mark 14:27-42 February 28, 2021

Lent 2

Jesus Submits for Us

 Be prepared. Don’t be caught off guard. We learn that lesson again and again. Every winter we check the furnace, make sure insulation is set, get out the snow shovels and salt. And we trust that the government and utilities are doing the same. We see the suffering in Texas and other states when people aren’t prepared. Complacency can be dangerous.

 We can’t afford to be complacent in spiritual matters either. If Satan finds us like Jesus’ disciples, asleep, he will work to rob us of our hope for eternity, as well as everything that gives purpose to life now. If you don’t see the danger and don’t prepare, it could be disastrous.

 Today we head to Gethsemane. It was a garden, a place where Jesus often gathered with his disciples to rest and be strengthened by God the Father. But this night there would be no rest. Jesus, God and man, would wrestle with the challenge before him. And he wanted his disciples with him, not only to support him, but so that they would be prepared. He wanted them to see their Savior taking their punishment; he wanted them to recognize that he was willingly drinking the cup of suffering for all of humanity. Let’s join them and see how Jesus Submits for Us.

 **They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”**

 Why did Jesus ask them to join him? It’s not that they should watch out for enemies—Jesus didn’t need to be warned so he can escape—he had no intention of escaping. No, Jesus wanted them to see the spiritual and emotional pain that he was going through—and to recognize that he was doing this for them. And Jesus wanted them to have the opportunity to respond in love, to join him, like spiritual brothers, to pray for him, to support him.

 But redemption is something Jesus must do alone.

 After praying, Jesus **returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour?Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”**

 Notice that Jesus spoke to Peter. Just before this, Peter had insisted that he would not abandon Jesus. He had boasted that even if all the others fell away; even if he had to die, he would never turn away. While Peter’s words might have sounded good, he had said that out of pride. He was confident in himself.

 But when Jesus asked him to watch, what did Peter do? He dozed off. And not once, but three times. Even after Jesus specifically warned him about the temptations, about the weakness of the flesh, still Peter fell asleep.

 We need Jesus’ warning, **Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.** Jesus warns us against the weakness of our flesh—things like greed, lust, envy, hatred. But so often we don’t watch and pray. We doze off spiritually and let these sins take over. Jesus warns us not to let anything distract us from his life-giving Word. But we doze off and neglect church and Bible reading and receiving the Sacrament. Jesus tells us that, yes, it’s okay to work hard and be successful, but don’t let money or success become your master. Watch and pray. But often we don’t. We make earthly wealth our top priority.

 God tells us not to fall asleep spiritually, so we don’t miss the love God has for us.

 As the disciples slept, what did they miss? Jesus had said, **“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,”**and now he would face that sorrow head on. For Jesus knew what was coming. In ancient times, it was common to see the inhuman treatment of those who were accused of crimes. Public flogging, stoning, and crucifixion—these were done out in the open. It must have been awful to witness the brutality, to hear the screams of the victims. Jesus would have seen such things. And now Jesus was going to have to endure such violence.

 And Jesus knew Scripture’s prophecies of what he would face. Like Isaiah: **“I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.”**  Or Psalm 22: **“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”**

 As Jesus prayed there in Gethsemane, it was just a few minutes before those prophecies would be fulfilled, with beatings and suffering that would only end the next afternoon as Jesus breathed his last breath. Every detail of what was coming was in Jesus’ mind. It’s no wonder that  **he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. *“Abba*, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.”**

 Jesus prayed this not just once, but three times. This was all part of the battle, the inner struggle Jesus endured as he faced the coming cross. Jesus knew that with God, everything is possible. So find some other way!

 Now we might ask, didn’t Jesus know that this was the Father’s will? Yes, Jesus is God, and he did know that. But he still asked, because everything was in the Father’s hands. And Jesus, God and man, was facing the ultimate horror.

 You see, the cup that Jesus faced was not just the suffering, not just the mockery, not just the physical death. It was the cup of God’s wrath. The anger that holy God has over all the sins of mankind—God’s anger at every sinful word from your mouth and every sinful thought in your head—all that anger was to be heaped on Jesus. Jesus would cry out that he was forsaken, abandoned by God, as he hung on the cross in our place.

 In a mystery we can’t begin to understand, God would be separated from God on the cross. Jesus Christ, true God as well as fully human, would be forsaken by God the Father. The One who made all things, the author of life, would die on that cross.

 This is impossible for us to comprehend. But in the Garden, Jesus fully comprehended it. And it was horrible. Luke said that as Jesus prayed, his sweat was like drops of blood.

 But as Jesus faced such torture, he did not give in. He won the battle. Already there at Gethsemane we can see that he is winning. After asking the Father to take the cup, Jesus added, **“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”** Jesus knew full well that it is his Father’s will that he drinks the cup of his wrath. And he was at peace with that. Jesus had perfect faith that if he goes ahead, if he suffers, if he drinks of God’s wrath, the victory will be won.

 The peace of victory is what Jesus felt as he left the garden. He was at peace with the Father’s will. Satan would not deter him. The cross was still ahead, but Jesus would triumph over it at the empty tomb. So he got up from his praying and sweating and bleeding and moved on with confidence. He said to his disciples, **“Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”**

 Jesus’ disciples had been sleeping—now there was no more time for that. But a time for rest would come. Jesus would die, but his death would save the world from sin and from Satan and from death. On Easter it would be clear. No more reason for worry or distress. The victory is won.

 Being a child can be such a blessing. Even when your family faces serious problems. Most parents work to hide their problems from their children. Parents might stay up late with the bills trying to make ends meet. They might get a second job, and look for extra work on the side. But they’ll try to let their kids be kids and not worry them. Let the kids play while the adults took care of the problems.

 In our lesson, we might say that Jesus is the adult, while the disciples are the children. They sleep while Jesus is battling to win their salvation. Their lives are in danger, but they don’t seem to realize it, so they fall asleep. Jesus battles temptation and weakness, and in the end submits to the Father’s will. Then when that battle is over, Jesus wakes his disciples. They don’t realize what they slept through. But the plan of redemption is being fulfilled.

 Jesus won our peace with God in his Passion, on the cross, and as he rose from his tomb. And we receive this peace whenever we stop and remember his suffering for us, and when we proclaim his death by celebrating the Lord’s Supper. In the assurance of Jesus’ victory, you can sleep peacefully and take your rest. For Jesus Submitted for Us.