

A sermon delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Palm/Passion Sunday, April 1, 2012, dedicated to Bill Wagner and to Ruth Lowe Sitler and their families, and always to the glory of God!

**“Jesus Prays
in the Time of Trial”
Mark 14:32-42**

**(Part VII of VIII in the Sermon Series
“Great Prayers of the Bible”)**

Prayer is primarily about paying attention to God. We have been looking at great prayers of Hebrew Scripture or the Old Testament. Today, we look at the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

There are three major types of Christian prayer forms. **Verbal prayers** are the form we most often use. In **verbal prayers** we address God with words, whether silently or aloud. There five categories of verbal prayers: adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession and petition. The second form is **meditation**. Meditation involves reflecting on an image or phrase, sitting with it, holding it, remaining with it. The final form of Christian prayer is **contemplation**. This is sitting with internal silence and absorbing the presence of God. In the garden, Jesus draws on verbal prayers, meditation, and contemplation as he draws close to his Father in heaven. For a moment, let us enter the Garden and be with him there . . . He prays: **“Abba, Father, for you all things are possible, remove this cup from me, yet not what I want but what you want.”** Let us pray . . .

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each

one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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After the Passover Seder at Barnabas's house, in which Jesus revealed to his disciples that his body would be broken for them and his blood would be shed for them, Jesus left Jerusalem in the dark of the night. He quietly exited the same Golden Gate through which he had entered on a donkey, with palms and loud hosannas surrounding him only four days before. With these closest friends, he zigzagged down through the barren Kidron Valley and climbed out of the valley onto the Mount of Olives. On the steep, rough paths through broom and olive trees, he made his way across the stony, narrow path. He entered the peaceful Garden named Gethsemane (which means "The Oil Press").

From the garden, Jesus could see the Temple Mount looming across the Kidron Valley to the east. He could see the fire from the sacrificial altar smoldering with cinders and fat and bones and a faint plume of smoke rising into the dark sky. The smell of death was lifting as sacrificial incense from the city of David.

The Judean wilderness was beyond in the vast darkness. To the southeast, a few lights spotted the hills by his birthplace, Bethlehem. To the northeast, the hill of crucifixion known as Golgotha, or the Hill of Skulls, loomed in the pitch darkness. He felt the "hill" closing in.

All around him, Gethsemane's hills were fragrant with spring. Olives and figs had begun to flower. The delicate scent of almond and quince was in the air. Life was all around him in the garden.

Death and life were uncertain as the distressed Son of God tried to find a heart and place for prayer on this night of Passover. He wanted God to "Passover" him, like the angels of death had passed over the Hebrew slaves in Egypt.

While the Galilean fishermen fell asleep from the wine of the night and the fatigue of these hard, conflictive days in Jerusalem, Jesus threw himself to rocky ground. He was absolutely distressed and agitated as he began to pray for God to pass over him. Luke tells us he sweat blood as he prayed (22:44). Mark tells us that he prayed one sentence to his “Abba” – his daddy. He said, **“Daddy, Father, for you all things are possible, remove this cup from me, yet not what I want but what you want.”**

How he longed for God reach down and sweep him away to a safe place. He longed for life while death was filling his senses. He prayed again: **“Daddy, Father, for you all things are possible, remove this cup from me, yet not what I want but what you want.”** In between this simple and profound prayer, Jesus chastised his disciples who could not stay awake with him in his time of distress and the terrible trial of his soul!

Feeling his soul torn in two, feeling the immensity of the silence of his Father, hearing the snoring of his closest friends - feeling abandoned by both friends and father - Jesus cried out - *“Get up and let us be going! See my betrayer is at hand!”* It was too late. Jesus’ anguished prayer in time of trial would lead to trial and death in need of prayer. The passion of our Savior Jesus Christ was at hand . . .

Read the Passion narrative: Mark 14:43-15:47