

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
March 23, 2014**

Luke 22:39-46

The Garden of Passion

- 1. A Difficult Proposition**
- 2. This is Life for Disciples**
- 3. Reality Reinforced**
- 4. What a Relief**
- 5. He Comes Back to Us**

Hymns: 385 – 714 – 118 – 103

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

³⁹ Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. ⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

Forty days. In the grand scheme of things, forty days doesn't really seem all that long. In fact, forty days can often go past in the blink of an eye. Yet, there are also times when forty days can seem to take forever. Forty days was the length of time that Moses stayed up on Mt. Sinai when God was giving him the Ten Commandments. For the Israelites who were waiting with uncertainty, those forty days surely crawled by. Forty days was the length of time that Noah and his family sat on the ark and watched the water fill the earth. Certainly, those forty days of rain (and I think that we can relate to that rain better than most) must've seemed like they would last forever. Forty days was the length of time that Jesus spent out in the wilderness alone, fasting and preparing to be tempted mightily by Satan. I can't imagine how slow those forty days must have gone by for Jesus as he

waited for Satan's attacks. Forty days. It can be a long time.

Just consider the forty days of Lent. At the beginning of Lent, we gather on Ash Wednesday to focus our hearts and begin a journey. We are reminded that sin, our sin, comes with the consequence of death, and we are encouraged to consider with solemnness what our sins do to us; what they do to God; what they did to Jesus. It is an important time of the church year. Without understanding the real effects of our sin, the work of Jesus means nothing. Without feeling the loss, the victory would be empty. But forty days is a long time to think our about sin and its effects. Forty days is a long time to worship without the joy of Alleluias. Forty days is a long time to stay focused on what Lent is all about.

So what do we do? We come up with ways to help us stay focused. On Ash Wednesday, we take the ash of palms and put it on our foreheads; a physical, visible reminder – "We are dust, and because of our sin, to dust we shall return." During the days of Lent, we offer extra worship opportunities; gatherings on Wednesday nights to hear the Passion history and meditate on Christ and his work. Perhaps most familiar in the world, there is the practice of giving something up for Lent; using that daily sacrifice of something we enjoy as a constant reminder to focus. Any of those practices can have very meaningful impacts, yet we know what so often happens to our plans.

Not long after the ash is washed off our foreheads, the reminder of what that ash means is gone as well. The time is crunched, the nights get filled, and it becomes easy to skip those midweek opportunities to focus. What is intriguing for a few days is not that fun for forty, so we give up on giving up, and we make that pleasure that we had put aside a part of our daily routine once again. Why? Because forty days is a long time. I mean as we sit here today, can you believe we are only about halfway through? For forty days, we are asked to focus and it is often too much. We falter; we grow tired; we lose focus.

It shouldn't surprise us that we struggle to stay focused on Christ and his life and his Word for these forty days of Lent. It shouldn't surprise us because Lent is just like life. And when it comes to life, the same thing happens. We are called to keep our focus, yet so often, we just end up faltering and failing when it comes to our Christian life and devotion.

While this doesn't provide us an excuse, I will tell you that this is how it always is for disciples of Jesus. To see that, all you need to do is take a look at the disciples that we heard about today in Luke 22.

These disciples were right in the middle of it, the fulfillment of the plan of salvation was taking place

right in front of them. Four days prior they had witnessed Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. A few hours ago, they had just taken part in the first celebration of the Lord's Supper. Now, here they were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. And he had one request for them, ***"Pray that you will not fall into temptation."*** (Luke 22:40) What was Jesus really saying with that decree? "Focus."

What happened to those disciples? In spite of all that was happening around them, all the experiences they were going through; in spite of whom this charge to focus came from directly; Luke tells us that ***"when (Jesus) went back to the disciples, he found them asleep."*** (Luke 22:45) They had faltered in the mission given. They failed to follow Jesus' command; simply put, they lost focus.

As we see those disciples falling to sleep on the job; as we consider our own failures to focus, not just in Lent, but also throughout our lives; a reality is painfully reinforced: If any part of God's plan was up to us; if any part of us being saved was contingent on our work; if ***anything*** in this world that deals with life in heaven was based on our work; it is amazing how miserably it would fail. It would all go terribly wrong, because even in the midst of deepest struggle, even during days when you would think focus would be easy, look at what happens: We falter and lose focus and fail.

What a relief, then, it is to see Jesus! In this Garden, we see his Passion; the struggle, the work, the focus! We see him as the perfect contrast to our failing. Luke tells us, ***"He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,"***⁴² ***"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."***⁴³ ***An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him."***⁴⁴ ***And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."*** Can you imagine those disciples' reaction when Jesus woke them from their slumber? Here was Jesus, so focused on his mission, so intent in his prayers, that sweat is pouring off his face. Here he is, putting in the work, while they slept.

What a relief when we know that this focused individual is the one carrying out the plan of salvation; that he is the one doing the work that God had prescribed for forgiveness to be given. It is not up to us. The work does not fall on our shoulders. Forgiveness does not depend on our focus. It is on Jesus, who is filled with this focus, who is devoted to his work, who is earnest in his prayer. And sent by God and strengthened by angels, it becomes certain that there will be no faltering. The work will be accomplished. What he was focused on doing, he would finish. What a relief to know that this man that we see in the Garden is our Savior.

What a blessing to see how he responds to our failures. From the other Gospels, we know that Jesus went back and found his disciples sleeping more than once. Yet, despite their repeated lack of focus, Jesus continued to go back to them. And take note of the message that he gave them. Assured of what he would do and accomplish, Jesus didn't say, ***"You know what, it doesn't matter that you are sleeping; it doesn't matter that you keep losing focus; I'm going to do the work anyways."*** No, instead, he comes and he urges them on; he pushes them to continue focusing, he says, ***"Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."*** He did that because though these men were prone to falter and lose focus, Jesus still wanted to use them. When his work of salvation was accomplished, Jesus would send them out. He would send them to go and tell the world about the work that Jesus had finished and the forgiveness and salvation that he had won.

But to do that, they would need to focus; they would need to watch what Jesus was about to suffer and endure so that they could go and witness; they would need to stand strong because when Satan could not deter Jesus' work any longer, then he would come after the disciples. Forgiveness did not depend on their focus, but focus was still needed.

And, of course, we share in the disciples' mission: to share what we have seen with those around us. And so, Jesus' words come to us as well, ***"Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."*** During these forty days of Lent, the devil can do nothing to hinder what Jesus has already done for every one of us. But during these forty days of Lent, and throughout the course of our lives, the devil can attack our focus, he can attack our faith, he can attack our forgiveness.

So use these days of Lent to focus. As painful as it is, focus on your failures. As painful as it is, focus on Jesus' sufferings and struggles. And then find relief, as you focus on the forgiveness that has been won for you. And find a purpose, as you focus on the mission that Jesus comes and gives to you. Amen.