

“Times of Anguish”

By Cathy Love

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Readings:

Mathew 26:36-46

A while ago, I introduced you to a song Looking Up by Sidewalk Prophets. At the time, another song spoke to me, but I filed it away for future use.

Today, as we approach Holy Week, that song and its message seem appropriate.

Please listen to the words of the song, especially the chorus that begins with the words Father Let it Be.

Song: Father Let it Be – Sidewalk Prophets

Play the video

[Sidewalk Prophets - Father, Let It Be \(Official Lyric Video\)](#)

Before I go any further, as is my tradition, I would like to share some information from the frontman for Sidewalk Prophets, Dave Frey, about the message behind the song.

“The more I live, the more I realize that asking for help, relying on loved ones, surrendering my will to the God that made the stars, and yet, somehow knows my name — that’s true strength,”

“When we can’t understand the path we’re walking, when we want to hold on **so tight**, it makes us feel comfortable, but only wastes us away; in those moments, we can declare, ‘Not my will, but Yours be done.’ Trusting God with everything is a place of surrender and sacrifice, but it’s the place I long to be.”

Now to turn to the lyrics that I felt were so important: on screen

Father, let it be

Help me to believe

Jesus tell me stories of the times you felt like me

Spirit, let me see

The forest through the trees

Help me understand these are the plans you have for me

If it's your will, God, let it be.

Do you notice this section has prayers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? Do you notice

the plea for assistance in surrendering to God's will?

Let's break it down even further and, for now, focus on one line. "Jesus tell me stories of the times you felt like me." On screen

I am going to focus on Jesus in the garden at Gethsemane. Out of the whole song, this line spoke to me, and the most impactful answer, I believe, comes to us from the reading this morning.

There is a lot to unpack in this journey Jesus undertakes, but I will focus on this small section. As always, I challenge you to research this topic further on your own or in a group and read some of the other sections of the Bible in which this story appears, including the one from this morning, the Gospels of Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and the Gospel of John 18.

Normally, this part of the story comes later in the Easter journey, but today we're bringing it forward intentionally.

Jesus' time in Gethsemane occurs the night before his crucifixion on the cross and after the Passover

meal with His disciples, so we may hear about it again in our Holy Week services.

After the last supper, Jesus takes His disciples to the Garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. The olive garden still exists, with what I understand to be pretty bent and gnarly trees. Although it is said that the original trees were destroyed by the Romans in AD70, the roots survived, and the trees regrew.

But I digress. The garden of Gethsemane, which means oil press, is said to be appropriate in meaning, as Jesus would be pressed by sorrow and anguish here, and the weight of what is coming.

This was a familiar place for Jesus and his disciples, as John 18:2 tells us, “Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.”

Jesus took Peter, James and John to a different place, separate from the rest of the disciples. He told them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

And what did they do? They fell asleep when He left them to go to pray to His Father. Jesus understood what was coming, but the disciples lacked the Spiritual Awareness that Jesus had. They did not feel the same urgency Jesus felt. He told them what was coming, but they didn't understand. They were tired.

These three disciples selected specifically by Jesus, in a likely quiet, isolated place, with the words of Jesus ringing in their ears, were asked to help Him and pray for Him, and yet they fell asleep. Not once, but three times, even after He returned to them and rebuked them.

Remember, at one point, he asked them, "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body (or flesh) is weak."

What does the sleeping of the disciples during their time in the garden reflect? Human weakness? Insincerity in prayer? Distraction? What do you think? I think we see the disciples' humanness. They were tired and had just had a full meal with Jesus.

I can't tell you the number of times I have determined I needed to spend time in prayer only to have my attention diverted to an unlimited number of earthly distractions.

Let's turn to Jesus. What does he do when he leaves them? He prays to His Father, asking if what was coming to Him would pass from Him. We hear the depth of his anguish in the words "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

He was asking for a way to avoid the suffering and sacrifice of the cross.

One interpretation I read about this passage stated, "By going to the cross, he would drink the cup of God's wrath. He would bear the divine judgment that falls rightly upon Israel, and, indeed, upon all humanity.

Though he had predicted his death and its necessity, as it drew near, he yearned for some other way. He hoped that his Father had some other option, and he asked for this openly.

There may be no more powerful and moving display in the Gospels of Jesus's humanity. Moreover, for God the Son to endure separation

from God the Father must have been horrifying to Jesus beyond anything you and I can imagine. “

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When Jesus said, “Father, if you are willing,” He acknowledged that his Heavenly Father had the final say. Moreover, he recognized that the Father’s wisdom was supreme. If the Father knew that it was necessary for Jesus to drink the cup of suffering and judgment, then that was best.

“Remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). *Not my will, but yours be done.* Jesus taught his followers to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

Life For Leaders March 18, 2026 (Mark D. Roberts)

As I researched this accounting, one explanation stated that this was the first stage of Christ’s suffering, which eventually led to His death. The physical and spiritual sufferings of Christ began here as he prays about what is ahead.

In Luke 22:43, we read “An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.” God had not abandoned Him and knew He needed help.

In Luke 22:44, we read “His sweat was like drops of blood” so great was his sorrow and anguish. An explanation offered in my comprehensive Bible is that, under extremely intense stress, the small capillaries in the sweat glands can rupture, mixing blood with sweat. So great was Jesus anguish.

Putting more human emotions to this situation, did Jesus feel loneliness like we often do? Imagine how you would feel if you entrusted three people to accompany you to a similar experience, you explained your pain to them, asked them to stay awake even for an hour, left them to go and pray, and returned to find them sleeping, not once but three times.

You turned to prayer as your human supports fail. Would you be as kind to your friends as Jesus was to His disciples? Remember, they kept going with Him on the journey. Or would there be a few choice and unkind words? Would you still be friends? God was there for Jesus, sending an angel to Him, and He is there for us in our times of need.

It is painful to read about the suffering of Jesus, who gave His life for us. It is impossible for me to imagine this scene, disciples sleeping through the very time Jesus asked them to be awake, and his

immense suffering not witnessed or understood by His human companions. His vulnerability with God, but his willingness for this suffering to happen for us, showing us His commitment to fulfilling scripture and the divine plan.

We see the themes of suffering, obedience, and the human experience of fear and loneliness in the face of impending trials.

This event shows the tension between divine purpose and human desire and Jesus' full humanity, but His willingness to endure suffering for others.

Notice this: Jesus did not run. Jesus did not hide. The agony in the garden produced resolve. Prayer did not remove the cross — it prepared Jesus for it.

We don't often think of Jesus as having doubts after all, He is God's precious Son. We learned about this message in a recent sermon of Rev. Lucas's on the transfiguration.

Let's think about some of the phrases associated with these events in the Garden of Gethsemane. We have heard "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak", Mark 14:38, "thy will be done", Matthew

26:39, “he who lives by the sword dies by the sword” Matthew 26:52, “sweating drops of blood” Luke 22:44 but perhaps the most impactful message relating to these events is actually found in 2Corinthians 5:21 God “made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

For us, this time in Gethsemane for Jesus reminds us of the importance of prayer, submission to God’s will, and the acknowledgment of human vulnerability in times of distress. It shows the dual nature of Jesus as I have mentioned – fully divine, yet fully human.

His honesty in prayer is a lesson for us to learn to say what is really in our hearts and on our minds without holding back because God can handle it. But then we also have to listen for God’s answer, whether we like it or not. We heard this message in the song and repeatedly so far today in the message.

The example of Jesus encourages us to be fully honest with God when we pray. We don’t have to be afraid of telling God the truth about us. We shouldn’t try to ‘say all the right things’ when these things are not a true reflection of what’s in our

hearts. The Father of Jesus already knows everything about us. He can handle anything we put before Him, anything and everything.

Don't we often try to bargain with God? God, if you do this (and you can insert whatever you ask for), then I promise to... and this promise ranges to a multitude of promises. Did you notice Jesus did not do this? He didn't say, if you take this cup, I will be a better person, stop sinning, whatever we would say. He asked God to take the cup, but if he didn't, Jesus acknowledged God's will and determined to follow His way.

I am not saying we shouldn't ask God for help, to ease our pain, to change things. That is human nature. God will not be shocked or offended if we ask to be released from what he has called us to. In fact, when we tell God the whole truth, God can touch our hearts, address our fears, and redirect our desires. God will help us to surrender to God's own will, confident in God's wisdom, love, and all-surpassing goodness.

In conclusion:

Gethsemane was the place where the battle was won before the nails were driven. The surrender in the garden made possible the victory at Calvary.

In response to the line Jesus, tell me stories of a time you felt like me in the song, Jesus absolutely suffered. Jesus does not deny His emotions or pretend strength. He goes to His Father and brings his anguish to Him. He surrenders to God's will.

This should give us comfort that when we cry out in our anguish, Jesus understands. When we face grief, betrayal, fear, or any other human emotion, we follow a Savior who understands deep distress. He is not distant from our suffering. He has walked through it. Although he pleaded to God, Jesus was obedient and surrendered to God following the predetermined path to the cross.

What Gethsemane Means for Us

- When we are pressed, God is present.
- When we are afraid, we can pray honestly.
- When we feel alone, heaven is closer than we think.
- When we surrender to God's will, we find strength to stand.

The garden reminds us that suffering is not the end of the story. Beyond Gethsemane lies the cross. Beyond the cross lies the empty tomb.

Jesus walked into that garden knowing what it would cost Him — and He chose obedience. He chose love. He chose us.

And because He did, we can pray with confidence, surrender with trust, and face our own “Gethsemanes” knowing that the One who knelt in the garden now reigns in glory. Amen.