

**Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021, St. Anne's
Exodus 12:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Mark 14:17-50**

It was the middle of the night and I was in the hospital sitting next to the bedside of my dying father. Three months earlier he had been diagnosed with late-stage lung cancer and since the diagnosis, he'd declined quickly. The previous night I'd received a frantic phone call from my mother telling me he'd been admitted to hospital and might not make it through the night. I drove up to Penticton where they lived, and now I sat alone by his bedside watching him breathe. My mother was exhausted from stress and 3 months of nursing him round the clock at home by herself, and I'd convinced her to lay down on a bed in the room next door and sleep. I *intended* to stay awake with him, not wanting him to die alone. But the stress and emotional turmoil had left *me* exhausted too. And despite my best efforts, over and over again I woke up face down on his bed rails. I was just *unable* to stay awake. So, eventually I gave in to the inevitable, put a pillow on the rail and my hand on his chest in the hope my subconscious would wake me if his chest stopped rising and falling, and I let myself sleep. Fortunately, he *didn't* die that night and Mom and I were both there and awake when he died in the small hours of the night a couple of days later.

The experience of that night many years ago left me with a lot of sympathy for the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Could you not stay awake *one hour!*?" Jesus says when he finds them sleeping. It's so easy to judge them, and find them wanting. To imagine that **we** would have done better. But you didn't have to be the Son of God to see how events were unfolding. Jesus was a marked man. The authorities were coming to arrest him, probably sooner rather than later since it was almost Passover. The disciples could see their hopes and dreams being dashed

against the cold rocks of the powers of this world. They were about to *lose* their beloved friend and teacher.

I suspect many of us have faced that *kind* of time at some point - dreading what's coming, and knowing there is absolutely **nothing** you can do to stop it. Like me on that night with my father, the disciples were probably too exhausted from stress and fear to be **able** to stay awake and keep watch with Jesus. Despite their high intentions and earnest commitments of earlier in the evening, there in the darkness of the garden they fall away, *unable* to stay awake and support him.

In the synoptic gospel accounts of this night Jesus own fear and stress are evident too. "Please God, take this cup from me! Isn't there another way? Can't there be a way forward that is faithful but that doesn't involve all this pain and loss? Please God, I see it coming, and I don't want it!" Jesus *doesn't* have a martyr complex. He doesn't **want** to die. He doesn't **want** to be put to the test. Of *course*, he **does** want to fulfil God's *purpose* for him... but in some **other** way if at all possible. But then, *unlike* the disciples who can't overcome **their** fear and stress to stay awake, Jesus steps past his fear. "But not what **I** want, but what **you** want." There, right there! Did you hear it? **Right there** is the point at which the new life of the resurrection *starts*. At **that** moment Jesus steps past his human fear and dread of the coming ordeal and submits himself to God's purpose. Faced with a terrible choice, he refuses to abandon the will of God - and with that decision, the die is cast. He *will* remain faithful no matter what! **That** is the moment the world changed.

We sometimes *imagine* he had no choice. That as the Son of God it was pre-ordained that he would die in this way and he just went along for the ride. But

Jesus is *fully human* and he **did** have a choice. Just like he had a *choice* whether or not to follow the will of God in the first place by taking up his ministry of healing, and teaching and challenging the status quo. By doing that, he challenged the powers that be and they'd decided to silence him. In faithfulness to God's desires for this world, Jesus said and did things that challenged the comfortable status quo - and those who benefitted from it, were *not* going to sit back quietly and let him get away with that.

But, even at this late date he **could** have decided to *run*. Left Jerusalem, left his ministry and headed back to Galilee... The authorities would probably have let him go - but that would mean leaving God's purposes behind too. He couldn't run away and then go back to the preaching and teaching and healing and exorcisms - that would just have further enraged the authorities and endangered those who followed and trusted him. And it would have left his followers uncertain about whether he really *was* someone who could be trusted. No, running away would mean turning his back on who he **was**. Turning his back on his divine mission. Sure, it would have allowed him to live longer - but that decision too, would have had a **cost**.

His ministry and faithfulness to God would have ended up as nothing more than a memory of 'The good old days' to be discussed on a quiet evening. "Remember how it was back then? Back when there were crowds of followers and people flocked to be healed and taught? Those were the days!"

Running away would have meant survival - but not **life**. Not the **true** life that comes from being in deep relationship with God and working for the fulfillment of **God's** vision for the world. And so, he *chose* the hard path. The one that lead to

death on a cross – willing to be faithful to God even when it meant the end of the life he loved. Trusting that God would **not** abandon him in the coming ordeal. Trusting that all would *ultimately* be well.

And the disciples? ... well despite their human frailty, their failings and fears, they too *eventually* found the courage to step up. It took them longer, but they were *transformed* by the experiences of Holy Week. Despite their oh, so ordinary human failings and fears, despite their *inability* to even stay awake with him in those final horrible hours, in the end they *found* the courage to follow the path of true life. And in doing so they became the founders of a communion of saints beyond their wildest dreams!