

Sermon Notes for 2/24/16 (Midweek Lent 3)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: Luke 22:39-46

Theme: DEALING WITH TEMPTATION: PRAYING OR SLEEPING?

Hymn: LBW 91 (Savior, When In Dust to You)

The Point: While the disciples sleep in temptation's hour, Jesus prays and encourages them (and us) to pray, since He is our source of help and strength in defeating Satan's advances.

Introduction: Last week we saw the contrast between the divided group of disciples who were arguing about who was the greatest, while one was in the process of betraying Jesus and another had heard that he would soon be denying Him, and the uniting power of Jesus, who offered Himself for them, even providing for the Church in all ages the uniting cup that conveys to us the forgiving blood which He shed at Calvary.

Tonight we look at another contrast, namely the contrasting ways of dealing with temptation that are evident in tonight's reading. Jesus' Passion is quickly moving to a crescendo. After the meal, He goes out to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke says this "was his custom," apparently the common place for the little band to resort for prayer and meditation.

Upon arriving there, Jesus warns the Eleven, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." He then moves on a little distance from them and seeks the Father's will in an intense time of prayer. His words are anguished enough: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Strengthened by the angel's appearance to Him, He continues to pray so earnestly and to feel the burden of His upcoming suffering that He begins to sweat blood.

Rousing Himself after this exhausting incident, He returns to the disciples and finds them "sleeping because of grief." He rebukes them with the word "Why are you sleeping?" and then encourages them once again to pray so that they will not fall into temptation. Sleeping is not a worthy way to deal with temptation.

Burglars, when they rob a house, sometimes chloroform those who dwell there so they may rob and loot at their pleasure. It would seem that Satan acts in much the same way when he seeks to rob men of their souls. He casts them into a deep sleep, gives them a false sense of safety, the conviction that while temptation and evil might destroy others, it could never destroy them. It is while men sleep that the devil does his work. Think about some of the examples in Scripture. Sisera, exhausted after the great Battle of Kishon, lay asleep in the house of Jael, where he had taken refuge, when that patriotic Hebrew took a hammer and drove a tent pin through the temple of the unconscious captain of Canaan. It was when Samson lay asleep on the lap of Delilah that the Philistines sheared him of his locks, stripping him of his great strength, and then put his eyes out and cast him into the dungeon to do the work of a slave.

Yet we often want to resort to sleep as a way to deal with our times of testing. We get tired, we are sad, we become depressed, and the pillow seems like a workable escape. But, because we are essentially relying on our own resources, we find that temptation is still as powerful as ever when we awake. Or we find that, even in our dreams, temptation dogs our heels and we awaken from fearful dreams in which we are always trying to get away and never finding the strength.

Standing in one of the great limestone caves of Bermuda, you can hear the flow of an underground stream. Those waters, ceaselessly flowing, have eroded the cavernous depths with their vast resounding chambers and fantastic decorations. The mind reels as it tries to estimate how long that stream has been running. So

temptation flows like a river through the life of man. Old races die out, and new races take their place. New powers are thought out and new devices invented, but through each generation of men there flows this river of temptation. How long temptation has been here! How old it is! How unchanging it is! It is as new as birth and as old as death. It touches the life of the philosopher and the fool, the prince and the pauper, the sage and the savage, Christ and Judas. Wherever man has gone, temptation has appeared. It is man's shadow, haunting him wherever he goes. It is the warfare from which there is no discharge.

So we need to learn to face temptation and to overcome it. Our Lord reminds us that prayer is our one tool in dealing with this racing river of temptation. And why is that? Because prayer forces us to take our eyes off our own resources and put them onto the resources that our Lord has in His hands. We do not have the power or courage or wisdom to face Satan, but Jesus does. Prayer escorts us into the Father's chambers.

If the thought of a godly father, or a praying mother, or a faithful wife, or an innocent child, will sometimes hold a man back from sin, how much more will the thought of the presence of Christ deliver the soul in the time of temptation? Every night at sunset four bugles are sounded from the castle rock at Edinburgh as night comes down over the great rock and the picturesque city. There is a tradition that after the fourth bugle has sounded over the darkening city those on the streets below can hear the sound of a fifth bugler—a bugler who long ago was slain. That is mere legend. But when a tried, troubled, tempted, or sin-wounded soul sounds the trumpet of resistance and repentance and recovery, out of the unseen comes the clear and unmistakable note of another trumpet. It is the answer of Christ to the soul that turns to Him and seeks in the battle of life His presence and His help.

Jesus speaks to, not only the content of our prayer, but also the result of our prayer. He tells the Eleven, "Pray that you may not come into temptation" and then again "Pray so that you do not come into temptation." Perhaps the most beautiful paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer ever written is that to be found in the eleventh canto of Dante's Purgatory, where the souls that are being purged of their sins repeat the Lord's Prayer, not so much for themselves as for those who come after them on the dangerous path of life. Dante's rendering of the sixth petition is as follows:

*Our virtue, which so soon doth harm receive,
Put not to peril with our ancient Foe;
But from his evil sting deliverance give.*

There is a legend that Augustine, accosted on the street by a former mistress shortly after his conversion, turned and walked in the opposite direction. Surprised, the woman cried out, "Augustine, it is I." But Augustine, proceeding on his way, cried back over his shoulder, "Yes, but it is not I." He meant that there was a new Augustine, and that this new Augustine would avoid the very territory and appearance of evil.

Conclusion: While the disciples sleep in temptation's hour, Jesus prays and encourages them (and us) to pray, since He is our source of help and strength in defeating Satan's advances. An African-American slave who had come to know the Lord Jesus as his Savior, and had come to realize the truth, "You are not your own, you are bought with a price" (I Cor. 6:19, 20) used to exclaim in moments of trial or temptation, "Massa, yo' property am in danger." Trusting alone to Him "that is able to keep" (Jude 1:24), he felt secure. When we cry out to our Lord that His property is in danger, we can be absolutely certain that He hears and answers us. Not sleeping, but praying to our Lord, who has conquered the old evil foe, is our surest instrument of deliverance in our daily battles with temptation. May the Lord grant you His peace in every time of need and trial. AMEN!