

SERMON ~ 03/29/2018 ~ “In The Garden” ~ A Service of Worship in Christian Unity with The United Church of Christ, First Congregational, The First Baptist Church and The Broad Street United Methodist Church of Norwich, NY ~ Holy Thursday A.K.A. Maundy Thursday ~ A Service Commemorating Some of the Events of the Day Before the Crucifixion.

**A READING FROM THE GOSPEL — Luke 22:39-54a [ILV]  
(PASTOR RACHEL MORSE)**

[39] Then Jesus left the room and the house and, as was the normal practice of the Rabbi, went to the Mount of Olives; the disciples followed. [40] When they reached that place, Jesus said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial, a test.”

[41] Then withdrawing from them about a stone’s throw, Jesus knelt down, and prayed: [42] “Abba, God, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but Yours be done.” {Later and less authoritative manuscripts add the next two sentences. [43] Then an angel from heaven appeared to and gave the Rabbi strength. [44] In anguish Jesus prayed more earnestly and sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.}

[45] Then Jesus stood up from praying, came to the disciples and found them sleeping, exhausted with grief. [46] So Jesus said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not be subjected to the time of trial.”

[47] While Jesus was still speaking, suddenly a crowd appeared and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. Judas approached Jesus to offer an embrace; [48] but Jesus said, “Judas, are you betraying the Chosen One with a kiss?”

[49] Those who were around Jesus, those who were near Jesus, saw what was going to happen and said, “Rabbi, should we strike with the sword?” [50] Now the attendant of the High Priest was among those in the crowd and one of them struck this person, cutting off the right ear.

[51] But Jesus said, “Stop! No more of this!” And, touching the attendant’s ear, healed it.

[52] Then Jesus said to those in the crowd— the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, the elders— “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit, a thief? [53] I was with you day after day in the temple and you did not lay hands on me, even though you could have done that at any time you wanted. But this— this— is your hour— the triumph of the night!”

[54a] And so, they arrested Jesus. They then brought the Rabbi into the house of the high priest.

SPECIAL MUSIC — “In the Garden” ~ The Bell Choir

**A MEDITATION — *In The Garden***

NOTE: The part of the narrator was read by Pastor Rachel Ann Morse. Judas was read by Pastor David Spiegel. Jesus was read by Pastor Joe Connolly. Peter was read by Mary Williams.

**NARRATOR:** The Gospel we have come to know as Luke tells us the time came for the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, the feast commonly called Passover. Jesus and the disciples arrive in Jerusalem to keep the feast there. One of the twelve, Judas, knows the Rabbi has made enemies among the leaders in Jerusalem. Therefore, this disciple— some think of him as the practical one since it is he who keeps track of the money the followers of Jesus hold in common— Judas approaches the religious scholars and the Chief Priests, the Temple authorities. Put another way, Judas goes to the *crème de la crème* of society in Jerusalem with a plan. ‘Since Jesus can raise emotions by simply speaking on a street corner,’ says Judas, ‘if you arrest Jesus there will be no fear of an uprising led by Jesus among the people during the feast.’ In Luke it says the one who is to betray Jesus is at the meal but it does not say when that one leaves the company of the others. So, as this scene unfolds, the Gospel story as we are about to hear it has come to the point where the disciples and Jesus have had the meal and have gone to the garden at the Mount of Olives. Jesus withdraws to pray while the disciples, overwhelmed with a sense of the events which might be impending, have taken to sleep. Jesus hears something and speaks.

**JESUS:** What was that? Who is there.

**JUDAS:** It is I— Judas.

**JESUS:** You did not come with us here after the Seder.

**JUDAS:** No. But I thought I knew where you would be. And I was right.

**JESUS:** You were... missed.

**JUDAS:** I had... business... business to which I needed to tend.

**JESUS:** Business— with you is it always business. You need to think less about business, less about money and more about the Dominion of God, the Realm of God. The Realm of God draws near, you know.

**JUDAS:** I think you’ve made that clear these last several years. (Slight pause.)

**JESUS:** So, where were you... really.

**JUDAS:** Rabbi, let me ask you a question: are you willing to give up your strange ideas?

**JESUS:** Strange?

**JUDAS:** Yes, strange. You just repeated a prime one. You have these ideas— you insist on talking about the nearness of the Dominion of God, the Realm of God. The Romans are too powerful to be overthrown. So it is perfectly clear the Realm of God is not near. If that were so, if the

Realm of God were at hand, we would be building an army of sufficient force to drive the Romans out of our land. The Religious Scholars—they understand the Realm of God is not at hand. They understand how much force it would take to drive out the Romans. And the Priests—they have control of the Temple. So, when it comes to worship, when it comes to how we worship, what they want to do is what gets done. Do you know what they are? They are practical. They seem to get along fine with our Jewish King, Herod.

**JESUS:** Herod knows how to play the politics of the Temple and the politics of Rome quite well.

**JUDAS:** Yes, Herod gets along just fine with the Temple Authorities and with all the Romans. And, of course, you know if any of us gets out of line, then Herod will simply call on that Roman, Pilate, the Prefect, and the troops under his command. The occupying army of Rome under the command of Pilate can make things very difficult for the people. If something goes amiss, if there are riots, if there is civil unrest, there would be much bloodshed. Many people would die.

**JESUS:** The Romans already murder many people each year. Thousands and thousands are crucified.

**JUDAS:** So I am sure you don't want any more to die than the Romans deem necessary. Rabbi, I know you love the people. I know you do not want any blood shed—not now, not in the near future. Perhaps in the distant future, when we, the Jewish people, can raise a credible army for ourselves—at that point we can strive to overthrow the yoke of Rome. But until then, cooperation seems like a wise course, does it not?

**JESUS:** And what makes you think I'm against cooperation.

**JUDAS:** What makes me think you're against cooperation? You keep gushing on and on about the nearness of the Realm of God! You just said it a short time ago! Did you not?

**JESUS:** Yes. I think the realm of God *is* near. But perhaps I do not think the Realm of God means what you think it means.

**JUDAS:** It means we shall be a free people.

**JESUS:** Does freedom mean bearing arms? Does freedom mean committing violence?

**JUDAS:** It does for the Romans.

**JESUS:** And what is good enough for the Romans is good enough for us?

**NARRATOR:** Peter, who has been asleep in a different part of the garden, comes upon Judas and Jesus.

**PETER:** Judas! We missed you after the Seder. Where were you? Did you go somewhere? (Slight pause.)

**JESUS:** He had... business... business to which he needed to tend.

**NARRATOR:** Peter draws a sword.

**PETER:** I still say this is the only business we need to be in. We need to be at the throats of the Romans.

**JUDAS:** So, Rabbi, you see? Even your beloved Simon thinks in the end violence will prevail.

**JESUS:** Simon... Peter... put that away.

**NARRATOR:** Jesus turns to Judas and says:

**JESUS:** You were there. You saw it. Why do they not understand? Even at the table earlier they argued among themselves like children. “Who is the greatest?” was their question. As if... that mattered. (Pause.) Peter... Peter... by brandishing that sword once again you are asking ‘who is the greatest?’ Who can marshal enough force is not what the Realm of God is about.

**JUDAS:** Good luck with that one, Jesus.

**JESUS:** Look, Peter, when I sent you and all the others out without a purse or a bag or sandals, did you lack anything?

**PETER:** No, not a thing.

**JESUS:** So, now you need swords? Do you want to live in a world where the person who has no sword must sell a cloak in order to buy one? Or do you want to live in a world where the Realm of God reigns? Do you want to live in a world where the love of God reigns?

**PETER:** I need a sword to protect me. I need a sword to protect you.

**JESUS:** Trusting God is not sufficient then?

**PETER:** Rabbi, you know what the prophets say. You have already told us the prophecies will be fulfilled in you.

**JESUS:** Simon, Simon, listen! All of you will be sifted like wheat. All of you will be tested. But the test will not be a test of power or of greatness. It will be a test of wisdom and of fortitude. And so, I have prayed for all of you that your own faith may not fail.

**PETER:** Still Jesus, I am ready to go with you to prison and even to death!

**JUDAS:** You see? You see what your talk about the Realm of God brings? I will see you later. I have to be about my business.

**NARRATOR:** Judas leaves their presence. And, indeed, he will be about his business, the business which has already been transacted with the religious scholars and the Chief Priests, the Temple authorities, the *crème de la crème* of society in Jerusalem.

**JESUS:** Peter, I do not think you understand. You may think you would go to prison or even die with me. But the cock will not crow this day until you have three times denied that you know me.

**PETER:** This cannot possible be. I will not have it! I will not deny you.

**JESUS:** Peter, do you not remember what I said earlier? This cup that is poured

out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

**PETER:** I heard you say that. I am not sure what you meant.

**JESUS:** You will understand. It will take time but you will understand.

**PETER:** You spoke of the covenant. Why?

**JESUS:** Our covenant is with God. The reign of God is at hand.

**PETER:** You spoke of blood. Does that not require a sword?

**JESUS:** (Slight pause.) I think... not. (Slight pause.) Go, Peter. Go back with the others for a bit. Let me be here alone. I need to pray. In time you will know what all this means. But right now it is a time for prayer. And I need to be alone. I need to speak with *Abba*, God.

**PETER:** All right. I will be just a little bit away. If you need me, call.

**JESUS:** I shall. I shall.

**NARRATOR:** And Peter went off, back to the others. Judas had, of course, gone off to fetch the Temple Authorities. And Jesus prayed. And so the story unfolded. Jesus was arrested and crucified by the Romans as a rebel, a rabble rouser. And there were no riots. But lives were changed. And Rome would destroy Jerusalem. And then Rome, itself, would be destroyed. But the work of the people of God remained. The covenant remained. (LONG PAUSE.) And we find these words in the Gospel known as Luke (BRIEF PAUSE.): “It was now about noon. And despite it being mid-day, the light of the sun failed and darkness came over the whole land; and the curtain in the sanctuary of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘*Abba!* Into your hands I commit my spirit.’” (LONG PAUSE.) “Having said this, Jesus breathed for the last time.”

SILENCE IS KEPT

**PASTOR DAVID SPIEGEL:**

Won't you please join with us in the Unison Prayer of Benediction found in the bulletin.

**UNISON BENEDICTION**

**Eternal God, whose whisper silences the shouts of the mighty, quiet within us every voice but Your own. Speak to us through the story of Jesus that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may receive the grace to show the love Christ exhibited for all humanity by committing our lives to the service of Your Dominion. Amen.**

“Were You There?” — The Bell Choir

The Congregation is invited to leave the worship space in silence.