

Garden of the Olive Press

Scripture: Matthew 26: 36 – 46

April 19, 2020

While at Licensed Lay Ministry School at Lexington Theological Seminary in KY I wrote a paper on Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. I had to present the paper before my class during a morning worship time. I got a 'B' on the paper and the only reason I did not get an 'A' was because I mispronounced 'Gethsemane' many times in my presentation!

The garden was in reality an olive orchard. I know most of us would think a garden is for flowers or vegetables, but the Garden of Gethsemane was an olive orchard. The word 'Gethsemane' means 'olive press' so let me refer to the garden as the Garden of the Olive Press so I will not miss pronounce 'Gethsemane' again!

When I traveled to the Holy Land on a faith journey two years ago, we took 'The Palm Sunday Walk'. The Palm Sunday Walk started on the Mt. of Olive or I would call it the Hill of Olive because it was not big enough to be called a mountain. Most in my group of 32 people walked from the Hill of Olive to the Lion's Gate located on the wall surround the Holy City of Jerusalem. This is the gate that Jesus would have entered Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday. We followed a path that Jesus probably took to Jerusalem. Some of us sang while walking, others walked silently. Some of us looked all around taking everything in while others focused on each footstep. And some of us were crying while others had a big smile on their face from ear to ear! It was hard to believe that my footsteps were walking on the same path that Jesus took! Our guide, Eli, told us that the walking path we were following has changed a lot since Jesus' time. The path Jesus took probably was

not a cobble stone path, it was probably a dirt path leading to a cobble stone entry through Lion's Gate. Eli also shared the path has more development along it and it probably was just a vast olive grove on the Hill. I could sense the excitement of the first Palm Sunday with people gathered around shouting praises to Jesus!

After getting to Lion's Gate, we returned a little way back up the hill to a walled in area that they had marked – Garden of the Olive Press. This was supposed the site where Jesus prayed in the garden and where the disciples fell asleep as Jesus prayed.

As we stood in the garden, nearby us was an ancient olive press. Our tour guide, Eli, shared this with us – In Jesus' day extracting olive oil from olives was a three step process:

Step #1 – whole olives were picked and put into a stone basin or vat. In the vat was an upright round stone with a large hole in the middle of it to support a wooden beam which would be inserted there. This beam enabled the stone to move and roll around the vat.

Step #2 – a horse or donkey would be harnessed to the beam and led around in a circular path causing the millstone to roll over the olives and crush them causing the precious oil to run out through a small hole in the side of the vat.

Step #3 and final step – the olive oil would slowly flow out of the hole in the side of the vat and be collected in a large container for storage.

This was the most common way of making olive oil in Jesus' day and this method is used even sometimes today in the Middle East. In fact, we saw many people doing this ancient process of collecting olive oil as we traveled throughout the Holy Land. This process of getting olive oil was done in the Garden of the Olive Press.

I did find it interesting that there was a less popular way of making olive oil in Jesus' day. In this method, olives are placed a large round vat or tub. Then some people would climb into the tub and walk upon the olives. They would tread upon the olives and crush them with their feet to make olive oil. Boy, when I heard of this method, it made me remember the 'I Love Lucy' show. I can remember my Dad sitting in his orange recliner watch that episode when Lucy was in Italy making wine with a local lady. Lucy and the local lady got into a fight while stomping grapes in the tub and they threw grapes at each other. I hope you remember this episode because my Dad and I laughed our butt off! It is hard to believe that people in Jesus' day would make olive oil by walking on the olives. In fact, the Prophet Micah spoke these words about this method when he said – *You shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil.*

While Jesus was in the Garden of the Olive Press, he also felt an enormous weight crushing him. While Jesus was in the garden, he felt the pressure upon him for what lies ahead for him. Jesus' pressure was not a physical one, rather a spiritual one. Jesus' weight was not a physical one, rather it was a heavenly one. The pressure on Jesus in the Garden of the Olive Press was so great that Jesus' sweat was like drops of blood pouring from his face as he prayed.

Yet, what did Jesus pray while under this great pressure, he prayed – *My Father, if it possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want!* And what did Jesus do? He went willingly to the cross to gain salvation for you and me.

In that paper I wrote at LTS that I spoke of earlier, I took the position in the paper that Jesus had a lapse in his faith in the garden. Jesus had a lapse in faith in his Father when he prayed in the garden. I wrote that Jesus had a conflict with God. Listen again to the first part of the prayer Jesus said in the Garden of the Olive Press - *My Father, if it possible, let this cup pass from me*. Did you hear Jesus struggling in his faith? Do you hear a lapse in faith?

This would be true if Jesus stopped his prayer there, but he does not! Now listen again to the second part of Jesus' prayer - *yet not what I want but what you want!* My favorite word in the second part of Jesus' prayer in the garden is the word 'BUT'. I love the word 'BUT'. I thank God for the word 'BUT'. I thank God for Jesus' prayer in the Garden of the Olive Press. I thank God for Jesus' willingness to do what he did for us. I thank God for the 'BUT'!

Jesus' prayer in the Garden of the Olive Press is like a coin. Every coin has two sides. The front is called 'Heads' which comes from Roman times. Usually on Roman coins the head of the Roman head of state was printed on the coin. The back of the coin is called 'Tails' because the British ten pence depicted the raised tail of a lion. 'Heads' for Roman Head of State and 'Tails' for a British lion's tail.

Like a coin, Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane possesses two sides. In the deepest hours of His life; on the night before Jesus will die on a cross, Jesus prayed – *Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done*. When Christ says – *Take this cup* – that is the raw honesty of prayer. Jesus reveals His personal desire. This is what I want done.

Then Jesus turns the coin by praying – *yet not my will but yours be done*. That is the side of abandoning ones will in favor of God's will. Abandoning ourselves to God begins when we simply say – But do what you want God!

This two sided prayer by Jesus in the Garden of the Olive Press has both sides of prayer – *take the cup from me* which is what we want God to do; and *yet not my will* which is what God will do.

Yes, there are two sides of Jesus and two sides of prayer. So what might we learn if we prayed honestly and with complete abandon as Jesus did? What situation are we facing right now where we can pray honestly yet abandon ourselves to God? Could the coronavirus be such a situation where a two sided prayer is needed?

Are you in your own Garden of the Olive Press right now? With the world pandemic happening, are you feeling like something is pressing down on you? When the olives were crushed, out came the precious oil. When the olives were smashed, out came a treasured oil. When Jesus was feeling the pressure upon him in the garden, out came our salvation. When Jesus was praying so hard that his sweat looked like drops of blood, out from his blood came our glory!

When I was in the Garden of the Olive Press two years ago, I remembered the pressure I had just experienced a little while before my trip to the Holy Land. I had a growth on the side of my neck and I had a surgery to remove the gland. For eight days after my surgery I waited for results of test on the gland to see if it was cancer. I did not sweat drops of blood like Jesus did but I was very anxious. When I was waiting in the doctor's office for my results that was the worst! The doctor came in, he first looked at my surgical scars and shared that they looked good. He talked to me about the surgery and how it went, then he paused and said – Any questions? I said – Doc, there is an elephant in the room, do I have cancer? The doctor said – NO, it's not! I would have told you that right away! At the moment my pressure was released!

Look at your life, look at all the times God has brought you out of times of trouble and times of trials. Look at your life when you have come out of your Garden of the Olive Press and produced a precious gift. Look at your life and your time under pressure and I hope you see when glory has come your way.

Look at our present world-wide situation with the coronavirus, look at our country's situation when for several days recently an American citizen passed away every 45 seconds. God will bring us out of these times of trouble and darkness. We are all in our personal Garden of the Olive Press. We are all facing many fears and extreme anxiety. Please remember that out of an olive press comes a precious gift of olive oil and out this time of stress will also come a precious gift – a stronger faith in God! I hope you can see glory coming?

I am sure there are people watching this service who are facing their Garden of the Olive Press. I am sure there are people viewing this service who will soon be facing their Garden of the Olive Press. Christ's pressure was far more difficult than ours but each of us must venture into the garden to pray and meditate on God in our life. I hope and pray that each of you will say the same thing Jesus said – *My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not what I want but what you want!*

Let us pray:

Redeeming God, help us to hold on to you in times of crushing trials. Show us the good you are bringing out of it all. Allow us to come out of our trials and pressures as a precious and treasured gift that is ready to serve you and your Most Holy Son better.

Father, help us follow the example of your Son set in prayer in the garden. Jesus spent everything so that we might possess real life that includes experiencing intimate prayer with you. AMEN.