

Matthew 26:36-41 (NRSV)

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." ³⁹And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." ⁴⁰Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Psalms 46:1-5, 10-11 (NRSV)

¹God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
³though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.

¹⁰"Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth."
¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

How do we prepare ourselves for what lies ahead? How do we become servant leaders? What habits shape us into the leaders God would have us be?

Gethsemane. The place of testing and temptation and submission. Jesus came there to pray on the eve of his crucifixion. He prayed for strength and even for another way forward, a way to avoid the horror that he knew lay just ahead. Avoiding the cross would be easy. Escape out the back of the garden, down the backside of the Mount of Olives, and into the Judean wilderness, where no one was found unless they wanted to be found. But Jesus prayed in the Garden and he stayed. He found the strength to stay faithful to the work that God had given him. He found the discipline to resist temptation, to turn aside from the easy way out.

We will all face Gethsemanes of one sort or another in our lives. Some big, some small. These places and times of testing and crisis. The question is how we'll respond. Will it be in faith or in panic? In confidence or in terror? Even more to the point, will we stand or will we run? How can we prepare ourselves for the difficult times that await us, so that we can remain faithful and hopeful, knowing . . . knowing! . . . that, as the psalmist wrote, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (psalm 46:1).

The habits of crisis

I'm often surprised by the things that come to my mind as I write these studies. Today is an example. Reflecting on how we could possibly learn to respond to crisis as Jesus responded in the Garden of Gethsemane, brought to mind my pilot training days. I had such a low draft lottery number (if you are young enough to have no clue what I'm talking about, be grateful), that I went ROTC in college and entered the USAF upon graduation where I spent my first twelve months learning to fly jets.

A key part of the curriculum was learning what to do in the event of an emergency, like the loss of one or both engines. We had manuals telling us what to do and classroom

instruction on every conceivable problem. We wore a quick-flip book of emergency procedures strapped to our thigh every time we went up. Our instructor pilots would demonstrate for us and then we'd practice and practice and then practice some more, until we got past the panic and grew confident that we knew what to do, so much so that we'd hardly have to think about it.

A Tale of Two Gardens

Adam was once in a garden. He had the opportunity to be obedient, to trust that God knows best and, thus, refuse to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. But Adam did not trust. He was not obedient. He came to his time of testing and trial . . . and failed. His disobedience set in motion the wrecking of humanity's relationship with God and the distortion of all creation.

Jesus, on the other hand, came to a garden on that spring night in 30AD. Like Adam, Jesus' obedience was tested. The gospel accounts of Jesus' Gethsemane experience reveal a man struggling with his choice, struggling to be obedient to his father. But where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. And in this lies our own salvation.

The Garden of Gethsemane is the reversal of the Garden of Eden. Jesus' decision to remain faithful in his obedience, to press on to the cross was the means for the healing of relationship and the restoration of the cosmos. As Paul would write in his letter to the Romans¹, "For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (5:19).

Despite our proclamation that Jesus was fully divine and fully human, we sometimes tend to cloud over his humanity. We have trouble imagining that Jesus was truly fearful or anxious, as if the right question is "How could God be scared?" But that's not the right question. Instead, we must strive to resist the temptation to see Jesus as less than human. Jesus faced the temptations and trials we face. For as D. Hare writes, "If Jesus was not fully human, the cross was an empty pantomime."

1. I'm excited to be teaching a class on the book of Romans in this fall's Bible Academy session. I'm teaching it twice each week, on Monday mornings and again on Tuesday evening. I hope you'll think about joining us for this journey through the Good News of Jesus Christ. Classes begin the week of September 24. More information is available at www.thebibleacademy.com.

For 2,000 years Jesus' followers have "practiced" their faith, endeavoring to deepen their trust in God, to renew and transform their minds, to serve others, and to prepare themselves for the storms of life. We practice and we practice and we practice again.

On his return trip from America, John Wesley's ship was overrun by a storm that caused Wesley to fear for his life. In the midst of the tumult, he observed the serenity of some of his fellow travelers, a group of Moravian pietists. He saw in them a deep and abiding faith, a peace in the face of terrible events that he desired for himself.

Though such faith is certainly a gift from God, it must also be learned and cultivated by being totally immersed in God and the ways of God. The spiritual disciplines are long-tested means of helping in this immersion, preparing us for the inevitable crises so that they do not overwhelm.

The habits of servanthood

Likewise, learning to be a servant takes practice, or as John Ortberg pointedly puts it, training not merely trying.¹

Prayer, reflective Scripture reading, worship, Bible study, service and more all help to develop within us the habits of a servant. It is a bit like language training. Anyone who has tried to learn another language knows that nothing beats total immersion in the new language. So also, the habits of servanthood are best learned by immersion.

I was a bit surprised when I got toward the end of Blanchard & Hodges book, *Lead Like Jesus*. Their chapter on the habits of a servant leader has none of the

leadership-speak, no tips on the practices of effective leaders, no more principles for the servant leader to follow. Instead, they turn to reflections on prayer, meditation, Scripture memorization, and reading the Bible. They speak of intimacy in relationship, the importance of group accountability, and listening to those who would tell us the truth. All this takes me back to last week's study and the need to embrace the total transformation of ourselves. The spiritual disciplines are essential to this extreme makeover.

So this is where our talk of servant leadership ends and our practice of it begins. These disciplines that help us to become like Jesus, to love like Jesus . . . to lead like Jesus.

¹This was the subject of a sermon series earlier this year. Those background studies are still available on-line at www.thebibleacademy.com.

Embracing Our Bibles

The fall session of the St. Andrew Bible Academy will be here soon, with classes beginning the week of September 24. Between the Bible Academy classes, the *Alpha* classes, Crown financial classes, and Bob Baldrige's Sunday evening Bible study, we stand a good chance of having more than 600 adults coming up to the church for a class this fall, which is a huge number compared to other Methodist churches our size. But still, in a church of 5,200 members (which does not include children) that still leaves thousands who do not participate. My question is always a simple "Why?" What holds so many of us back from experiencing the joy of Bible study with other Christians? I can honestly say that I've met few people who regretted taking the plunge. Many people at St. Andrew have, to their surprise, found that on-going participation in Bible study has shaped their lives in ways they could have hardly imagined.

I've learned that many people hesitate to start a Bible study because they know that they don't know much about the Bible and they don't want to be embarrassed. Since Bible education was neglected in the Methodist church for so long this isn't surprising. But this fall, we are offering three great introductory classes to help you get started.

I will be teaching *Introducing the Bible* on Monday evenings in the Bible Academy. This is a great class if you've never been part of a Bible study before. In fact, I assume that no one in the class has ever opened the covers of a Bible. Though your contributions during class will be welcome, you will never be called upon to speak. Yet even if you've been around Bible study for awhile, this class will help you to grasp the over-arching biblical story. I offer this class only once every couple of years, so now is the time to get started.

Frankey Commer is one of our most popular Bible Academy teachers. Her Thursday morning class has grown each year. Frankey's fall class is *Exploring the Old Testament*, a great opportunity to learn your way around the Bible Jesus read.

These and the rest of the Bible Academy classes will begin the week of September 24. From more information and to register on-line go to www.thebibleacademy.com.

Alpha, on Wednesday evenings, is a fast paced, interactive journey to talk about faith issues, explore the Christian faith and discuss religion in a relaxed, non-threatening manner. *Alpha* will begin on September 19. For more information, visit www.standrewumc.org or call Rev. Debbie Lyons at 214-291-8007.

READING WITH HEART & MIND, SEPTEMBER 2-8

Sunday, Deuteronomy 22:13-30, 24:1-5 These passages are about marriage and the problems of marriage. Though these come to us from a culture very different from our own, what is there here that could help us grow our marriages to be everything that God hopes they would be?

Monday, Deuteronomy 26:1-15 What is God trying to teach the Israelites here? This passage is about tithes, offerings, and first fruits. What can we learn here about the relationship of our faith to our own possessions?

Tuesday, Deuteronomy 29:2-29 The story of the Exodus, of God's salvation of the Hebrews, is retold yet again. What explanation could we give for returning to this story time and again? What is emphasized in this telling?

Wednesday, Deuteronomy 30: This is a chapter of great hope, that after the curse and devastation that lies ahead if Israel proves unfaithful, as Israel does, God will yet renew the covenant and redeem his people. How does this promise play itself out in the New Testament?

Thursday, Deuteronomy 31:1-12 Here, Moses hands over the mantle of leadership to Joshua. Why does Moses not lead the people into the promised land? Why is Joshua chosen? To get the full story, you'll have to look back to the people's first arrival at the borders of Canaan.

Friday, Deuteronomy 33 These are Moses' blessings on each of the tribes. How would you summarize them? Do any of the tribes seem to be favored? You might try reading Peterson's rendering of these blessings in *The Message*.

Saturday, Deuteronomy 34 So we come to Moses' death. How is he remembered in these closing verses? What do you think is meant by Moses' knowing God "face to face?" Do you think that you will ever know God in that way? Might you ever know God even better than that? Hint – read Revelation 22:1-6.

Sermon Notes

www.thebibleacademy.com

Registration for the Fall 2007 Bible Academy session is now open. We are offering daytime and evening classes as well as two one-day Saturday workshops. There is something for everyone this fall and we hope that you'll make plans now to be a part of it. Classes will begin the week of September 24. Brochures for the fall session are available around the church and will arrive in homes soon.

Scott Engle's Sunday morning class, *Something More*, moves to Festival Hall at 11am next Sunday and the new teaching service at 9:30 begins!

Join us for an exciting series on the book of Revelation.

The new teaching service at 9:30 in the main sanctuary will begin next Sunday, Sept. 9. Because Scott will be preaching in that service each week, his Sunday class is moving to 11am in Festival Hall. If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages and focuses on a deeper understanding of Scripture. Whether you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at sengle@thebibleacademy.com.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

You might begin this week by talking about or reflecting upon a "Gethsemane" in your own life, a time of severe testing and crisis. How did you respond? Were your actions governed by fear or panic? How do you think we could be better prepared for those inevitable crises? Why do you think that some people get through them well, while others seem to fall apart? I've often thought that you get to see the genuine person, the authentic leader, in tough times. Do you agree? How does crisis strip us down to our essentials?

How can our faith better prepare us to handle crises, whether in our personal lives or on the job? How might a deeper trust in God breed greater confidence in the future? How do we find the peace that passes all understanding and how can we bring this peace to the times when we need it most?

Finally, are you cultivating habits that will help shape you into a servant leader? If so, what habits are they? Why do you think that Blanchard & Hodges suggest the habits of a servant leader ought to be the spiritual disciplines such as prayer and Bible reading? Why would our practice of servanthood begin there?