

#29
June 24, 2018

Living Well.

Very Dark on a Very Bright Day

Mt 26:36-44

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. He said to the disciples, “Stay here while I go and pray over there.” ³⁷ When he took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, he began to feel sad and anxious. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “I’m very sad. It’s as if I’m dying. Stay here and keep alert with me.” ³⁹ Then he went a short distance farther and fell on his face and prayed, “My Father, if it’s possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.”

⁴⁰ He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, “Couldn’t you stay alert one hour with me?” ⁴¹ Stay alert and pray so that you won’t give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak.” ⁴² A second time he went away and prayed, “My Father, if it’s not possible that this cup be taken away unless I drink it, then let it be what you want.”

⁴³ Again he came and found them sleeping. Their eyes were heavy with sleep. ⁴⁴ But he left them and again went and prayed the same words for the third time.



We started our deep walk with very challenging subjects. But I do believe that if we want to grow we need changes, we need to face some difficult subjects. We need to start with ourselves.

If you have been on the airplane, you have seen some videos, or heard the flight attendants tell you that you have to put the oxygen mask first on yourself before helping others. It does sound selfish because you think you need to help others. However, there is not much you can do if you are dead. Isn't that the same with spiritual lives? What can you offer or how can talk about life, when you spiritually dead? So first, we must deal with our own souls. We need a correct relationship with God and with others so we can offer what we have in ourselves.



When I was in seminary and we as family were attending one of the big Methodist churches in Lexington. I participate in a small group. In that small group we did our life inventory. Tell me about hard things. We were told to write all the things we could remember: Very good ones and very bad ones. Write the names of those you hurt – all of them, those you did not forgive, things you did and things that have been done to you... oh my... it took weeks to do it. I actually felt worse after doing it than before. Like digging in the trash can: Things stink. Only afterward did a huge healing relief come. Many mountains fell from my shoulders. That turmoil which would consume me as I would I think about, ponder, feel anger and resentment, was gone. These people who have harmed me, these people who hurt me, these people who acted unjustly were no longer my heaviness. I was also not thinking or feeling heavy from the things I have done.

Jesus said, “I came that you might have abundant life”

Today is our third Sunday of a series on Living Well. What does it mean for you to live? How do you view life?

- The Dalai Lama: "The purpose of our lives is to be happy."
- Ralph Waldo Emerson: "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."
- Nelson Henderson: "The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit."
- H. L. Mencken: "You come into the world with nothing, and the purpose of your life is to make something out of nothing."
- Monty Python: "It's nothing very special. Try to be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book every now and then, get some walking in, and try to live together in peace and harmony with people of all creeds and nations."

What is life for you?

I am certain that we all have a purpose of life. We are created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Ecclesiastes tells us our duty is to fear God and keep his commandments. It is God's will that no one perish. Our part in this is to believe in God, to be disciples of Christ, inviting others to be believers and truly learning what does it mean to love and be holy.



I am grateful to Peter Scazzero, for he tries to go beneath the iceberg and help all of us to break the old patterns, to look and understand why we do not grow spiritually, why we are not able to live the way we should be living as Christians.

We talked about the feelings. We have to admit what we feel to ourselves and to God. We must be honest and cry out to God like David in the Psalms. We are healed by recognizing the true feelings: Not by hiding, ignoring or pretending.

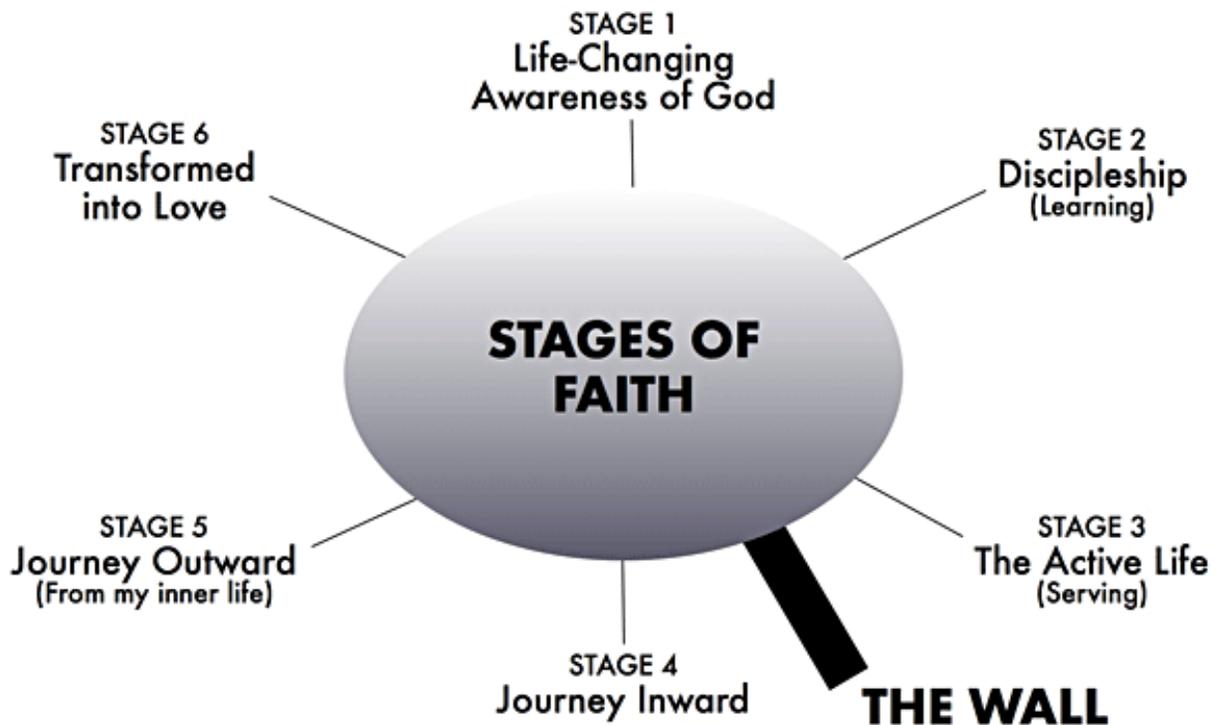
Last Sunday we talked about past. What should we do with the past? Should we go over it, around it or under it? Joseph faced the past. He forgave and embraced the past. He was blessed and was able to see the purpose of his life. It comes as a gift and a blessing from God when we face the past that we try to forget.

Are you not afraid what is coming this Sunday? It is getting better :)

Very Dark on a Very Bright Day

Today we will talk about the dark times that come in our lives. Peter, the author of the book Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, calls it walls. I know these times as the dark night of the soul. Most of the time the experience is connected with the true hardness that comes in our life. For example:

Divorce, a job loss, death of a close friend or family member, cancer diagnosis, a wayward child, a car accident, an inability to get pregnant, a deep desire to marry, a dryness or loss of joy in our relationship with God.



In his book, Scazzero, presents a scheme, that I want to share with you. He is convinced and I agree, the wall, the times of dark nights of the soul is part of our journey with God. They are a part of our growing. We cannot control the seasons of the year. We face them as they come. It is the same with the seasons of our faith.

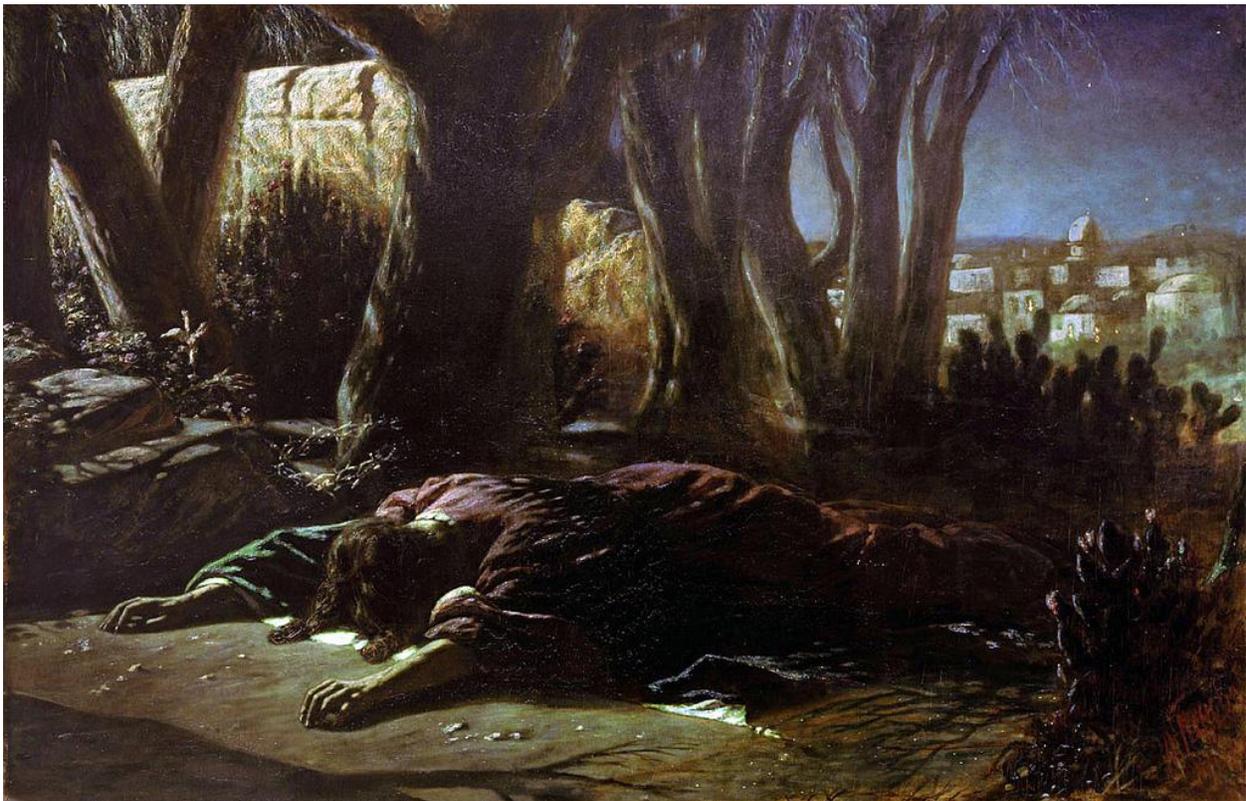
We know what it is like to find ourselves in the deepest dark of night, when it feels like the life is too heavy, the pain is too big, there is no hope or no desire to live.

It feels that God does not hear you, it feels like God does not exist. If you have never felt that way you are among very few, but if you have felt that way or you are now in the very tough time in life, hang in there. I promise the morning will come and it will get better. We have put our faith and hope in the one who has gone through the darkest night and shows us the way. We can follow Him and face the dark nights, face walls and finally get out with a totally new capacity to understand and embrace life.

Today's reading comes from Matthew. Jesus knew all the time, the purpose of His life here on earth. But this time he knew it was very near. You maybe have lots of good friends, maybe you have few. But when it comes to something big, there are only a handful, whom you trust and want to be with you. At the most important time for Jesus, he asked only three to come with him to the place called Gethsemane. Peter,

James and John went with Jesus to pray. The name Gethsemane literally means "the olive press," and it is poetically significant of the crushing pressure Christ now felt.

Though, he had his disciples with him, he went even further to pray alone. He asked them to pray for him. Because he felt sad and anxious. Verse 38: Then he said to them, "I'm very sad. It's as if I'm dying. Stay here and keep alert with me." Hear what Jesus says, I feel sad and anxious, I feel like I am dying.



He walked on the sea, he calmed the storms, raised up people from death, defeated demons... now is feeling weak, he needs his disciples to help Him in prayer...

When in the heaviest time for Jesus came, He went to pray. He fell on his face and prayed, "My Father, if it's possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want." He fell on his face. That's what is written. Think of the need He had, think how He, the Son of God, humbled himself in prayer before His Father. He came to be with God in prayer. That's the only place for us all in the most difficult times. There are no words recorded of what God said Him. Maybe it was a silence. Maybe he felt that God did not hear Him. Have you ever fallen down the face in prayer? Have you ever been in such a need of God? And then all you got was silence?

I tell you, you have few choices: say, forget it, God does not exist or come back and pray again.

Jesus says: My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from me. Jesus was asking not to die on the cross. He was asking that the cup will be taken away from him. It not the cup that he does not want -- it is what is in the cup. Jesus saw himself being made sin and he felt repulsion. He was the spotless, pure Lamb of God, and he had never known sin. To have almighty God place upon him all the sin of the world was more than he could bear. He was pure and precious and entirely righteous, and as he looked into that cup, he saw himself being made sin. He saw himself as the object of God's wrath. Just a thought, think of a cup in which all the sins are in there including the most horrible sins. All what sin causes is suffering. It maybe appears good or, gives some kind of pleasure but all it leaves for you and the people around you in suffering.

Jesus asked the cup to removed. In the very last minute, we see him again truly human. He will have to suffer, to die, for all of the sinful humanity.

Have you asked God for something to be taken away from your life? Have you asked to have something changed? God, please do not let this happen... Have you prayed and asked that you or somebody else will not suffer any more? I have.

After an hour Jesus comes back and finds the disciples asleep. Is it hard to pray for an hour? How hard is it for us to take time and pray for an hour? Especially if we are tired? We figure prayer is just a prayer, just words... We think it is not the most important thing.

If is so, why did Jesus ask them to pray? Why did he pray?

It was hard for the disciples to pray. They went asleep. We have all done that. We still do. Jesus is not mad at them. He just states that their spirit is eager but the flesh is weak. Jesus says, pray so you will not get into temptations. Isn't the best prescription for us in our quest for holiness? Pray, so that you will not get into temptations. You will find strength through the prayer! Pray, so that you will not miss the opportunity to be with Jesus.

Jesus went back to pray – a second time. What? It was not enough for an hour? Does he has something else to say? What did God not hear in the first time? He goes and prays again: The same prayer. He is facing the hardest time and still cannot go...

Jesus comes back to the disciples hoping they understand the need of them to be praying for and with him. No, they were asleep. But this time Jesus did not wake them up.

Jesus went and prayed with the same words for the third time: "My Father, if it's not possible that this cup be taken away unless I drink it, then let it be what you want."

Jesus wanted this cup to be taken away, but in the second part of His prayer, he said, "Let it be what you want, Father." This is the prayer in the darkest nights of our lives. We should honestly tell that we feel like dying and we wish not to have it, but we are ready to surrender. We must trust that we need to go through it. We need to know and humble ourselves. We did not create this world. We did not create the day. We are to trust with all that we are and all that we are facing to the hands of God. We stay in the prayer and it is best if we have people to pray with us. It is good and we need to pray alone, but we have to ask others to come and pray with us.

After reading this passage and studying and going deeper, one thing has become very clear to me: it was at that moment that Jesus wins the victory. He won the battle with evil, with trying to argue, he win the battle that he will need to go and face. Yes, he had to do it all, but in that third time when he went to pray he got his soul ready. He was prepared to face the difficulty and go through with what He needed to do. Victory was won in prayer.

None of the disciples guessed that the real test of their souls would not come when the soldiers came for Jesus, but when Jesus drew them away to a quiet place to watch and pray. It was there in the garden of prayer where victory was won.

Jesus came back to his disciples and said, "Let's go". Get up. They were not in prayer and they started to fight when they saw the large crowd carrying swords and clubs. One of his disciples cut the ear off. This is how we fight when we do not spend time in prayer. We fight with a sword and cut off ears. The battle is won in prayer.

The darkest hours turn into the morning light when we stay in prayer and trust even if we do not feel, do not hear or even doubt if anyone hears. We are not the same and we are not alone. Prayer is the way we face life and live well.

Practice prayer. Start with little prayers. Keep at it. Spend time in the presence of the one who is more than able to get you through the darkest hours. As you pray you will find the victory.