

“The Prayer of Peace in the Midst of Turmoil” (the Olive Tree)—  
Luke 22:39-41

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Prayer of Peace in the Midst of Turmoil” (the Olive Tree), is Luke 22:39-41 → *Jesus went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed Him. And when He came to the place, He said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Throughout our Lenten journey we have heard how trees were used in Scripture to describe our relationship with Yahweh and His dealings with His people throughout history. As we move through what church tradition has labeled “Holy Week” we find Jesus taking His disciples to a garden called Gethsemane, located on the Mount of Olives. The word “Gethsemane” means “oil press,” a reference to the oil extracted from the fruit produced by the olive trees in the garden.

Olive trees are rather unique. If a person irrigates an olive tree and cares for it intently under the best possible conditions, it’ll take about ten years before the tree produces a good crop of olives. Under less favorable conditions it can take up to thirty years. At the same time, a

study conducted on three olive trees located in the Garden of Gethsemane has shown their trunks and branches to be around 900 years old (“Gethsemane Olive Trees Among World’s Oldest” by Naomi Tupper, Olive Oil Times, October 30, 2012).

In Scripture olive oil was used as fuel for lamps, for medicinal purposes, for the anointing of kings, in the sacrifices to Yahweh and, of course, for food. Even today in Mediterranean regions the olive is the fruit par excellence, the fresh fruit or its oil finding a place at every meal. One can readily see why the olive tree was held in high regard and valued, with its oil in high demand as a staple of their life.

The olive tree has become a symbol of peace even into our time. The Romans used it extensively in their dealings with other nations as a symbol of peace. Christian tradition associates it with peace in relation to the Flood, the end of which was revealed by a dove returning to Noah with *a freshly plucked olive leaf . . . in her mouth* (cf. Genesis 8:11). Some consider olive trees a symbol of peace because of their slow growth process. Not being cultivated during war time they were also considered peace time trees.

Our text finds Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on *the Mount of Olives*, surrounded by these “peace time” trees. This was not the first time Jesus came to this place. Verse 39 of our text says Jesus *went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed Him.*

He *often met there with His disciples* (cf. John 18:2). Since it was common for those making pilgrimages to Jerusalem to lodge on the Mount of Olives, and since Jesus had *nowhere to lay His head* (cf. Matthew 8:20), Jesus lodged there during the nights (cf. Matthew 21:17).

On this particular night Jesus was not experiencing peace as He *knelt down and prayed . . .* or was He? He described His turmoil as His *soul being very sorrowful even to death* (cf. Mark 14:34). Knowing what lay before Him was more than just the physical pain connected with His torture and death on the cross, His very *soul* was in turmoil. The struggle which Jesus was going through according to His human nature was what He would face in the upcoming hours which was necessary to bring you peace with God. He needed to suffer the punishment of hell for you. He would experience a temporary separation from His Father so you won't have to experience it eternally.

His prayer? Three times He prayed: *Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will* (cf. Mark 14:36). In spite of what it appears to be it is actually the prayer **of** peace in the midst of the turmoil of His soul. It is different than the common practice of praying **for** peace. Many people look for peace apart from their turmoil, suffering and struggles. They look for peace as something achieved after the struggle is over and fail to recognize peace is a fruit of the Spirit, not a fruit of life going "my way."

It is no wonder Jesus tells us in verse 40 of our text: *Pray that you may not enter into temptation.* The temptation is to use prayer in an effort to manipulate God into doing things “my way.” That is sin. Prayer is not an act of manipulation but rather a confession of submission as an act of faith. Thus, Jesus prayed: *Father, **if You are willing**, remove this cup from Me. **Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done*** (cf. Luke 22:42). The confession of submission expresses itself in the midst of the turmoil of your soul, your conscience racked with guilt, your body feeling all dried up and your spirit crushed because of your sins. The prayer **of** peace comes in the midst of the turmoil with this presence of sin in your life.

Hebrews 5:7 harkens back to this prayer of peace in the midst of Jesus’s turmoil: *In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him Who was able to save him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence (i.e. submission).* Submitting perfectly to His Father’s plan for your forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, Hebrews 5:9 goes on to say that *He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.* As the Prince of Peace (cf. Isaiah 9:6) Jesus has made it possible for you to be at peace with God, yourself and others.

This peace is yours by faith in Jesus, confessing your sins to God and trusting completely and only in Christ’s atoning death on the cross

for your forgiveness. Romans 5:1-2 says: *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* Your peace comes because you *stand* before God in ***this*** grace which causes you to rejoice, even in the midst of turmoil. Thus, Romans 5:3 goes on to say: *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings.*

Surrounded by a grove of olive trees, Jesus' disciples did not have peace. They were ready to *strike with the sword*. One of them even *struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear* (cf. Luke 22:49-50). Jesus commanded peace and brought peace to the servant by healing his ear. In the midst of this olive grove Judas did not have peace as he betrayed His Savior into death for a measly thirty pieces of silver. The band of soldiers were not at peace as they came expecting a battle, armed *with swords and clubs*. The only One Who was at peace in the Garden of Gethsemane that night was Jesus, the One Who was about to experience the greatest spiritual turmoil of all.

After praying in a garden which symbolized peace, Jesus continued to make His way toward Calvary to provide you with peace. There He suffered the torment of your sin and the agony of your death so that you might be brought into true peace with God and have forgiveness which knows no limits. No matter your circumstances or challenges of life,

Christ makes His way to the cross for your forgiveness and peace.

So we continue walking with Christ this night toward the cross because the journey He makes brings us peace according to His promise in John 16:33 → *I have said these things to you, that **in Me** you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world. Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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