

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED
Matthew 26:45-46
REST AND TOIL IN GETHSEMANE

Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

Work and rest—two very opposite concepts. Sometimes one or the other is not appropriate. Like resting while driving the car, or working while lying in the hospital

In the text from this evening's Passion History reading, we see both rest and work going on in the Garden of Gethsemane at the same time. Jesus and His disciples had finished the Passover meal in the upper room, and Jesus had finished His long discourses (talks, discussions) with them, both in the upper room and at the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem. --- As a bit of an aside, the Mt. of Olives was not a lone peak next to the city. It was not what we think of as a "mountain." It was a mile long ridge with several "high points" just east of Jerusalem. The ridge ran north and south. It was on this ridge on Palm Sunday, five days prior to Gethsemane, that Jesus had ridden a donkey down the slopes of the Mt. of Olives from Bethany to Jerusalem. --- The Mt. of Olives was a place where one could find separation from the big city. That night at the Mt. of Olives, Jesus led His disciples a grove, to a "garden," called Gethsemane. Likely the trees in that garden were olives trees. The name "Gethsemane" means "oil press." An oil press was used to press olive oil from olives. The Gospels tell us that this was a place Jesus had frequently taken His disciples. It must have been rather secluded and private. He needed time to prepare for the approaching events of the night and of the next day. He would be arrested, beaten, mocked, falsely accused and condemned, and crucified. He needed time to be strengthened in His inner spirit and in His resolve to forge ahead, not in compulsion, but in love to rescue and save each of us from the sentence of our sins.

He asked His disciples to wait while He turned to His Father in heaven in prayer. He took Peter, James, and John with Him further and told them that His soul was laboring deeply, that He was distressed and sorrowful even to the point of laying it all aside, laying it down, dying, without going through with the real death He had come to die—being "wounded for our transgressions (sins), and bruised for our iniquities (guilt)" (Isaiah 53:5), crushed with our death for sin. He told them to stay there watching in encouragement, supportive of His mission which they themselves needed so badly. Jesus went a stone's throw further to beg, beseech and intreat His Father, that if there were any other way to accomplish forgiveness and salvation for sinners, to so do it.

It's hard to understand what Jesus was really facing. All I can understand are some weak earthly comparisons—knowing that tomorrow is the day to hear from the doctor, next week I have to have a talk that I'm not wanting to have with my boss, or maybe it's a delicate but much needed discussion with husband or wife, or next month—and this I only know from what others have told me—calving season begins, and that's a challenge. You know how an impending event can weigh on your heart and mind, spirit and body. It was much more for Jesus. He personally would face His Father's anger, almighty God's wrath, for the disobedience of all the world. No wonder He was weary—indeed true God, but also true man. He wanted strengthening and support.

But the disciples did not put their backs to the wheel, or dig their feet in for a big push. They were physically tired. It had been a long day, a busy week, an emotional week, a draining week. The contagious joy of Palm Sunday, Hosanna! Come save us now, O promised Son of David! Correcting the actions of the temple leaders with Jesus driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple, Jesus answering every cleverly designed trap from the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Herodians, the excitement of another Passover, Jesus' very heartfelt and earnest words earlier that evening after the meal. They were tired. They needed to rest. They didn't grasp the import of the events about to happen. So they slept and rested!

Have you ever rested at the wrong time? Slept through the alarm and were late for school, for work, for an appointment at the bank, missed a plane, late to pick up your child, husband, or wife? We aren't always alert to what's happening around us. Lagging in the yard while the storm clouds are billowing. Driving on the road while the blizzard is encroaching. It happens in the spiritual realm too. Playing with fire of sin, figuring you'll never get burned. Hearing and heeding Satan's alluring calls to curse and to swear, to lash out in temper, to push people

around if not physically then psychologically, to yield to sexual sins in word, deed, or thought. Not being alert to what's happening around us is part of the scene for sin. And Sin has consequences. Satan plays, not just for fun, but for keeps. You do distress your Savior with every intentional, careless, or thoughtless sin. For all the good decisions you make, for all the right things you do, you still fall asleep "in Gethsemane"—as the disciples did—physically and spiritually. Adam and Eve were not alert in the Garden of Eden. Watch and pray Jesus said, the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. The real problem, shameful to say, is we don't and we can't. That's how dire our situation is. One can't stop a train. We are in over our heads and don't and can't accomplish what we need. We fall short. We sin. Remember how sure Peter was, that he could do it. "Even if it is necessary that I die with You, I will never deny You," he had said earlier that evening. Like a youngster carrying a glass dish filled with soup, "I can do it," then crash.

With thanksgiving in our hearts, Jesus is the Savior for such helpless souls. He did not rest in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was working intensely. He knew His mission and He prayed to His Father for strength. He had his face to the ground! Think of Him, Jesus, with His face to the ground, seeking His Father's answer. Luke tells us an angel came to strengthen Him and thereafter Jesus prayed on. Luke tells us His sweat fell as drops of blood. "Drops" is the common English translation, but the word is really more like "clots," globs of water congealing with blood. "Thrombos" is the word here. Thrombosis is a medical term you may know—clotting. Various medical experts have said under great duress, the tiny blood vessels under the skin can rupture and bleed out with the sweat. You know how a person can sweat when on the hot seat, whether at work, in the sheriff's car, on the witness stand, or under any close scrutiny and questioning. Jesus was not resting in Gethsemane, He was working.

And He was willing to do what His Father knew was best for saving sinners. "Thy will be done," He prayed. *If this cup cannot pass, lest I drink it, Thy will be done.* He would drink it, with its poison. It would affect Him inside and out. He would drink it--not forced to swallow it, but swallow it with intent, with love, and with His Father's support. For you.

The disciples rested, while Jesus worked so intensely. It sounds sad, and it is. But in a sense that's exactly the way it has to be. You must rest from your labors of trying to get yourself to heaven. You can't do it. The proud human heart doesn't like to admit that "I can't." But in matters of having "righteousness" acceptable to God, you can't. You and I need Jesus. And that's why He came. When Isaiah spoke of Jesus and His coming work, he wrote "I have trodden the winepress alone" (Isaiah 63:3). Jesus alone. Jesus Himself. Earlier that evening Jesus Himself had described for the disciples the impending events of that night with the words of Zechariah 13:7: "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." Jesus would take this beating and death alone.

But in His suffering, and resurrection, you indeed are given real Rest. You are given the peace of God that passes all understanding. You are given a conscience at peace with God, because God the Father through Christ is at peace with you. "Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find Rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28). Plus even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, there is no evil to fear (Psalm 23:4). Jesus will raise you up and take you body and soul to the final, eternal Rest of heaven!

Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going, Jesus said to His disciples. . Let us be going with Him also! In Him we have God's love and rest for our conscience in our days and months and years and forever. Let us walk with Him in our actions, words, and thoughts. Jesus toiled in the Garden to give us Rest. Take heart! Serve Him.

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach ----