

Sabbath Moments
A Service of Healing and Wholeness
Sunday, March 29, 2009, 6 p.m.
Southport Presbyterian Church
The Toney Chapel

Going a little farther alone – our Gethsemane Solitudes...

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. (Matthew 26:36-40, 42-44, NIV)

Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self... Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter – the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self. (Henri Nouwen, from *The Way of the Heart*)

Then, accompanied by the disciples, Jesus left the upstairs room and went as usual to the Mount of Olives. There he told them, “Pray...”

He walked away, about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.

At last he stood up again and returned to the disciples, only to find them asleep, exhausted from grief. (From Luke 22:39-45, NLT)

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me – naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken – nothing... As soon as I decide to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies, and weird associations jump

about in my mind like monkeys in a banana tree... The task is to persevere in my solitude, to stay in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of pounding on my door and leave me alone... That is the struggle. It is the struggle to die to the false self. But this struggle is far, far beyond our own strength. Anyone who wants to fight his demons with his own weapons is a fool. The confrontation with our own frightening nothingness forces us to surrender ourselves totally and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ. (Henri Nouwen, from *The Way of the Heart*)

They came to an area called Gethsemane. Jesus told his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James, and John with him. He plunged into a sinkhole of dreadful agony. He told them, “I feel bad enough right now to die. Stay here and keep vigil with me.”

Going a little ahead, he fell to the ground and prayed for a way out: “Papa, Father, you can – can’t you? – get me out of this. Take this cup from me. But please, not what I want – what do you want?”

He came back and found them sound asleep. He said to Peter, “Simon, you went to sleep on me? Can’t you stick it out with me a single hour? Stay alert, be in prayer, so you don’t enter the danger zone without even knowing it. Don’t be naïve. Part of you is eager, ready for anything in God; but another part is as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire. (Mark 14:32-38, *The Message*)

Almighty and eternal God,

You are hidden from my sight:

You are beyond the understanding of my mind:

Your thoughts are not as my thoughts:

Your ways are past finding out.

Yet You have breathed Your Spirit into my life:

Yet You have formed my mind to seek You:

Yet You have inclined my heart to love You:

Yet You have made me restless for the rest that is in You:

Yet You have planted within me a hunger and thirst that make me dissatisfied with all the joys of earth.

O You who alone know what lies before me this day, grant that in every hour of it I may stay close to You. Let me be in the world, yet not of it. Let me use this world without abusing it. Let me today embark on no undertaking that is not in line with Your will for my life, nor shrink from any sacrifice which Your will may demand. Suggest, direct, control every movement of my mind; for my Lord Christ’s sake. Amen.

(John Baillie, from *A Diary of Private Prayer*)

God be with you as you enter a new week.