

“Wake Up, Get Up, and For Heaven’s Sake, Get Going”

Maundy Thursday 2007

Meditation on Matthew 26:20-46

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Did you know that the signs and symptoms of grieving the loss of a loved one can take place before the loss actually occurs? It’s called “anticipatory grief.” Such things as poor concentration, changes in sleeping and eating habits, denial and fatigue may happen. It begins with receiving the terminal diagnosis of the loved one and is triggered further by the loss of control, fears related to life without this person, and fears of starting over.

I share this because it sure seems to me that Jesus’ disciples found themselves in the Garden of Anticipatory Grief. Actually, it was the Garden of Gethsemane they found themselves in after their Last Supper with Jesus; “Gethsemane” being an ancient word associated with where olives for olive oil are procured. But there was something much more pressing on the minds and hearts of the disciples than the processing of olives. They were in the process of going with Jesus to the place where his very life and all of humankind’s sins were to be processed straight through him. Plus, the weight of grief was particularly heavy because Jesus had made it clear that they – his closest friends in the world -- would betray him, that they would be part of the “sin press” that was his crucifixion.

How would you have been feeling in that situation? This was not just any loved one. This was the one you had dropped your net, your livelihood for. This was the one you had abandoned your family to follow. This was the one you had given your all to in support of a social, spiritual revolution. And this was the one upon whom all the hopes of your ancestors alighted, whose miraculous arrival and bloody, humiliating end for the salvation of the world had been anticipated for centuries. No, this was not just any loved one. This was the Son of the Father. This was the Alpha and the Omega of all love.

During that time when Jesus was counting pounding pulse-beats before his betrayer arrived, he very much needed the love and support of his closest friends on earth. Even though he knew the acts of cowardice they would all eventually commit, in those moments before his arrest and trial, he needed them to be alert and to keep watch with him. But this was not possible for them in that Garden of Anticipatory Grief.

Every one of them lost concentration and succumbed to fatigue. They slept while Jesus wept.

Jesus wept because he too seems to have had some anticipatory grief. He asked his Abba, his Father, if he just might have the cup – that is, the time of trial – lifted away from him. It was all too much to bear. Even Jesus suffered the grip of grief. That's one of the things I love so much about Him. He cried, he grieved, he got very angry at times. He really did share our sorrows and endure our sufferings. But he did it in a way that ultimately turned around and pointed to hope, for he was obediently heaven bound.

But the disciples could not wake up, could not get up, could not, for heaven's sake, get going. Until, that is, the hour of betrayal finally arrived. Judas, who had slipped (perhaps slithered) away immediately following supper, rejoined the group there in the Garden of Anticipatory Grief, in order to seal with a kiss his dark deal and Jesus' demise. The passion, the drama, the very real grief commenced from there.

But tonight, we are still in that garden. And, if prayerfully focused, our hearts are heavy with anticipatory grief. We know what happens next in the story. We know of the spikes driven straight through his wrists, the thorns that scraped his scalp, the spiteful spittle that stained his cheeks, the humiliating words that were hammered into and above his head.

We need to keep alert. We need to stay awake. We need to keep going. But tonight, we are weighed down with sorrow and with sleep. The only way forward is by recalling that the hour of our loved one indeed came to pass ...