

24 February 2016
Lent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Little (or BIG!) Peter in Each of Us: Complacency”
Text: Matthew 26:36-46; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Fresh off Peter’s confident statements that he would never fall away from Jesus, even if all the others did; and, that he would never deny Jesus, even if it meant death, Peter now finds himself . . . asleep. He is not overcome when the shepherd is struck. He is not overcome with fear or threats. He is overcome *with sleep*. He is worn down. He is drained. Physically, emotionally, spiritually. His *spirit is willing but his flesh is weak*.

That’s how it is, isn’t it? With us, too. We get tired. We let our guard down. And before you know it, we have drifted off into sin.

Jesus and His eleven disciples had eaten the Passover and had gone to the Mount of Olives. Now the hour of evil, the hour of darkness, is almost here. Jesus knows it; the eleven do not. He singles out His special three - Peter, James, and John. The three who saw Him in the glory of His Transfiguration would now be with Him in the agony of His prayer. They should have known something was up, as Jesus *began to be sorrowful and troubled*. Something which, according to the Gospel accounts, they had not seen before. And Jesus voices it to them: *My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me*. He then goes a little farther and falls on His face in prayer.

How long did it take? 15 minutes? 30 minutes? before their eyes closed in sleep, so that when Jesus came back in one hour, He *found them sleeping*. And notice: *Jesus addresses Peter*. All three fell asleep, but Peter is singled out. For Peter had confidently and proudly singled himself out: *Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away*. Peter is not as strong as he thinks. If the shepherd was going to be struck and that shepherd is now sorrowful and troubled, why wasn’t Peter on the alert and watching and ready?

And so Jesus warns them. *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation*. The danger is not just to Jesus. There is danger for them as well. But Peter is oblivious to the threats that might be out there. So off to sleep again he goes. Sleep well, Peter, while your Saviour wrestles in prayer. Sleep well, Peter, while your Saviour agonizes for you. Sleep well, Peter, for your Saviour will not sleep again until He sleeps the sleep of death and is laid in the tomb.

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. Those are words for us tonight as well, for whether you are aware of it or not, the tempter wants you. And while he may

at times come at us with a full frontal assault, more often than not, I think, he wears us down, tires us out, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, until we let our guard down. A day without prayer quickly becomes three. A week without God's Word becomes two or more. Coveting replaces contentment. Grudges become firmer and forgiveness becomes harder. Disobedience grows into disrespect and bears the fruit of bitterness. Fear increases and faith decreases. And how else? For you? You didn't even see it coming. It just happens . . . like sleep in a garden.

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The tempter wants you, and he is patient and persistent.

But here is the good news for us tonight. As much as the tempter wants you, **Jesus wants you even more.** And so the agony of Gethsemane is just the prelude to the suffering of the cross. Jesus would drink the bitter cup of God's wrath - every last drop of it - so there's none left for you. He saw what was in that cup, the horror of sin and evil and the crushing weight that awaited Him. Your sin, your death, your hell, on Him, in Him. That is why He asked if there was any other way. But there wasn't. So *Thy will be done*, He prays. And with that prayer, the Father's will is His will. He drinks it. He goes to the cross, so you never will.

Thy will be done we also pray, with Jesus. But now it is quite different. For God's will is that we now drink a different cup - not a bitter cup, but a cup of blessing; not a cup filled with wrath, but filled with forgiveness; not a cup of horror, but the blood of our loving Saviour, poured out for you. That's your Father's will for you now.

And with that cup comes life - a new life. A life of forgiveness, not grudges. Of contentment, not coveting. Of joyful obedience and good works. Of faith and peace. And a life of prayer. Of knowing the danger that lurks around us everyday, and so praying: *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* Deliver us from the evil one. Make the fruits of Your cross grow in us, that we not fall asleep, that we not be unaware, that we not grow complacent, but live in Christ and His life, and He in us.

Maybe the current direction of our culture will help wake us up. The wrestlings of Christians being persecuted in our own country, the agony of Christians being beheaded in others, and the sorrow of the general movement away from the truth of God's Word. Paul told the Thessalonian Christians to be ready, good words for us as well, and to ***encourage one another and build one another up***, which sounds very much like Jesus' ***watch with me***. And it is. *For whatever you do to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you have done it unto me* (Matt 25:40).

So let us watch and pray with our brothers and sisters and so - even today - watch with Christ. But even more important than watching *with* Christ is to watch Christ. To watch His love. To watch His struggle in the garden. To watch Him on the cross. To watch Him

rise. To watch Him come to us and for us now in His Word and Sacrament. And one day to watch Him come again in glory, when all who sleep in death will rise, and live where no temptation or sin or evil will ever come again.

So to watch *with* Christ is what we should do. Lord, help us to do that! But to watch Christ is to see what He has done for me. And seeing, believe. And believing, have life. A new life that starts now and lasts forever. And that you have that life is the Father's will for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.