

15 March 2017
Lent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“*Where in the World Is God?* In a Garden, Praying”

Text: Genesis 18:16-33; Matthew 26:36-46

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Where in the world is God? Last week, we saw Him on a donkey. Tonight, we see Him in a garden, praying. Jesus, the God-man, praying to His Father in heaven.

That’s what we do, when we’re in trouble, or when we’re troubled by something happening in our lives or in the world. We pray. *God, don’t you see what’s happening? God, please do something about it.* Maybe we even try to tell Him what to do.

And we do that because we know who God is. He is not just a ruler. He is not just a powerful force. He is not just the almighty. He is our Father. He is merciful and gracious. He is loving and working all things together for our good. He is a promise making God. A God who has promised to save us, and has done it. To such a God, then, a Father God, we can come with any request, any petition, any trouble, as the catechism says: *as dear children ask their dear father.* Because as a dear Father, He loves to hear from His children.

And so we heard the Father listening to Abraham’s prayer tonight. Abraham was concerned not for himself, but for his neighbors, including his nephew Lot and his family. God had determined to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin. *But what about the righteous people living in those cities?* Abraham wondered. *Would God destroy the righteous with the wicked?* That’s not the God He knew. The God of Eden, the God of Noah, or the God who had promised him a son through whom all the nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). A God who takes sin seriously, but is a God not of death but of life; a God who wants not condemnation but salvation.

So he prays. What if there are 50 righteous? Or 45 . . . 40 . . . 30 . . . 20 . . . 10? And through it all the Lord is not angry with Abraham for his prayer, but patiently teaching him. And Abraham learning, step by step, how gracious and merciful the Lord is.

For God knew what He would do. He planned to rescue Lot and his family. And that through Lot He would give the men of Sodom one more chance to repent and change their ways. (Imagine if ten had repented, how different the story would have turned out!) And just as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah troubled Abraham, so it did not

please God. For God desires not the death of any sinner, but that all would turn from their evil ways and live (Ezekiel 33:11). But for those who persist in their evil ways, their godless ways, the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Which, in the end, is what we deserve too. But God knew what He would do. He planned to rescue us. And to do so, He didn't send angels (as He sent to Lot [Genesis 19:1]), He sent His Son. That for the sake of one righteous man, the Son of God born a son of man, the world might be saved.

And so just like with Abraham, the night before that destruction was to take place, Jesus prayed. Just like Abraham, He was troubled. For the wrath against sin that was about to poured out was far greater than what was poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah. The wrath about to be poured out was for every Sodom and Gomorrah of all times and all places. A concentrated and consolidated wrath many, many times greater was about to poured out upon that one righteous man instead of upon all the wicked, that the wicked might live. Live in the forgiveness He was about to provide for them. For the sake of one, who would be *Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted* (LSB #451).

Under that burden, then, Jesus prays. To His Father. What took place that night is shrouded in mystery to us. The Son pouring out His prayer to His Father. The Father hearing the sorrow and struggle of His Son. Yet both knowing what was going to happen the next day. This was the will of God. The will of the Father AND the will of the Son. So great the love of God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - for all people. There was no other way. Jesus' prayer doesn't mean Jesus didn't want to do this. He did. From eternity. But it shows us the magnitude of what was about to take place. To magnitude of our sin, of God's wrath against sin, and the sacrifice Jesus was about to make for you and me.

Maybe you've struggled in prayer like this. Or maybe you've been more like ***Peter and the two sons of Zebedee*** - James and John. Weak and unable to stay awake. Unable to pray as we ought. Unable to persevere. I'm sure they wanted to, just as I'm sure you want to. But as Jesus said, ***the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak***.

So how good then to see this night that God is here and praying for us and praying with us. Praying for us when our prayers fail. Praying for us when our prayers are inadequate. Praying for us when we don't know what to pray. Pulling us into His prayers to teach us how to pray. Carrying our burdens and sorrows, being strong when we are weak, and faithful when we are faithless.

There is no trouble or trial, struggle or sorrow that you have that Jesus does not know. Yet while they are too much for us, they are not too much for Him. And so when we wonder *Where in the world is God?* when these things happen . . . the truth is that when these things happen, He is not far from us, but close to us. Helping us and praying for us.

Three times Jesus went and prayed. And after the third time, it was time - time to be betrayed, time to be glorified, time to die. Time to be the righteous one to save the unrighteous. Which He did. When after three days, it was time - time to rise, time to be glorified, time to live. And because Jesus did, so will you. You made righteous by Him, by grace through faith. For now, the struggle continues. But the third day is coming. And *Where in the world God is* is with you in the struggle, that *you be with Him in Paradise* (Luke 23:43).

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