

IN THE GARDEN

It began in a Garden called Gethsemane, a garden of olives, with twisted tree trunks lined up in rows, green leaves still and unmoving in the stagnant air. This story began at night, with the sky black as pitch. Silent except for the sound of the footsteps of Jesus, and three of his disciples, Peter, John, and James. They had been to this Garden before; it was a place where Jesus would often go pray to His Heavenly Father.

These men were dear friends. Friends who had spent the last three years together. Traveled together. Ate meals together. Laughed together. Cried together. These men saw Jesus do miraculous things. Things like taking a few fish and a few loaves of bread and multiplying them by the hundreds. They saw Jesus walk on water. They saw lame people walk. Blind men see. The dead raised to life. Those three years were incredible.

When they entered the Garden, Jesus told them to wait. So they sat, weary, leaning against the tree trunks. It had been a tiring day, and a strange week. It had started off with a long walk to Jerusalem, with an entry fit for a king: people lined the dusty street, and they shouted and waved palm leaves in the air and laid their cloaks down in front of Jesus as he rode past them on a colt.

But now, after the Passover dinner, they were exhausted. The weight of Jesus' words at supper was heavy on them. That was perhaps what made them the most tired, weary, and sick with sadness. He said some things that were deeply troubling: he said words like "betrayal," words like "denial," words like "suffering," and words like "death."

Peter could sense something was wrong. He had been at Jesus' side for the last two Passovers, but this was different. There was something else hanging over the room: something deeply solemn, something deeply troubling.

Why had Jesus washed their feet? Why was he so insistent when Jesus tried to make him stop? Even worse, Peter just couldn't understand what Jesus meant when he said he would deny him three times. How could he say such a thing? He would never turn his back on Jesus, ever! Didn't Jesus know how much he loved him? Didn't he know that he would do anything for him? That he would die for him?

As Jesus's back became shadow and he left his three friends and walked deeper into the garden, and as they heard him begin to pray, despite the hard ground, despite their concern, despite Jesus' sorrowful face and his instruction to them to pray and wait for him, their eyelids became heavy, and sleep overcame them. They were sad. And they cared: they cared and were worried for their friend. But they were exhausted. They were worn. Their spirits were willing. But their flesh was weak.

If only they had stayed awake. If only they had stayed up. He told them to wait, but if only they had followed Jesus deeper into the Garden, they would have seen. They would have known.

If Peter had stayed awake, maybe he would have seen what deepest sorrow looks like. Deepest sorrow was Jesus in the Garden, stretched out on the ground, his face dripping with sweat like drops of blood. It was Jesus, feeling so sorrowful that it was as though death himself had wrapped his hand around his heart. Deepest sorrow, as Jesus lay, praying, in the Garden, was knowing what would happen in the day ahead, knowing what was being asked of him by God. Knowing that in the day ahead, his closest friends, followers, people whose lives he changed, people he had devoted himself to, people he loved, would desert him. Deepest sorrow was knowing that he would be reviled, spit upon, flogged, humiliated, with a purple robe slung over his raw and back and hunched shoulders, that he would be taunted. That a crown

woven of thorns would be thrust on his brow, that he would be immobilized as his hands and feet were pierced with nails into wood.

But none of those things twisted his heart more than the knowledge that God, his Father, whom he had always known and had never been separated from, was asking this of him. And Jesus knew that the next day, in his time of greatest need that his Heavenly Father would turn his back on him and leave him.

If he had heard it, Peter would have known that Jesus' prayer was one of deepest sorrow and broken heartedness.

And if Peter had stayed awake, he would have heard what fear and isolation sounds like. He would have heard it in Jesus' words as he prayed, his voice breaking: "Abba, Father, all things are possible with you. Abba, you can take this cup from me." This cup was a much different cup from the one at supper only hours earlier. This cup was one of suffering. This cup was a cup filled with physical pain, and spiritual torment at the hands of angry, hateful, corrupt, and perhaps most disturbing, indifferent people. This cup was one of judgment, the wrath of God. God had demanded a sacrifice: he had made a covenant, one that was marked by animal's blood on hundreds of altars for thousands of years. And now the blood that was to be spilled was Jesus'.

And this cup was a cup of solitude and deepest loneliness. Jesus knew that God's forgiveness and favor rested on this cup, this tilted, spilled cup of judgment. When Jesus took this cup, one he didn't deserve, one he didn't want, he knew God would leave him. Jesus would suffer in a way no human had ever suffered: He would be completely alone, without God's presence, favor, or love. All because of this cup. Three times, Jesus prayed: "Father, if you are willing: remove this cup from me."

But if Peter had stayed awake and been at Jesus' side as he prayed, he would have also seen what complete submission looked like: Jesus, kneeling at the feet of his father, suffering deep anguish, and fear, but saying: "Father, not my will but yours be done." Jesus submitted to God. He knew what was ahead, and yet he submitted fully and completely to the will of God. Jesus knew that God had a larger plan. Jesus knew that despite the suffering ahead of him, that God would bring something good, something that would redeem the darkness in the world. And so, with great heaviness, great sadness, but with faith in His Heavenly Father, Jesus placed his life in the hands of God.

But the disciples slept. They slept until Jesus came over and crouched beside them, gently shaking each of them by the shoulder: "Could you not wait for me one hour?" he asked, his face haggard, his eyes red-rimmed.

And before any of them could say anything else, a crowd of people led by their friend Judas, came into sight.

I am a lot like Peter. I say one thing, but do another. I say I am willing, that I am loyal to Jesus, that I will withstand any and all obstacles, trials, doubts, struggles, and that I will be faithful. That I believe in Jesus, and that I would never deny him. And yet, how often do I find my own exhaustion, my own weaknesses, my own struggles preventing me from remaining faithful to him in prayer, in love, and in belief? How often do I find my words not matching up with my actions? How often do I make promises I can't keep? How often do I speak faith, but act in disbelief? How often do I claim to have no fear through Christ, but deny his power and goodness in the midst of uncertainty?

Very often, I am Peter. But I should be like Jesus, who, in the midst of deepest sorrow and loneliness, knelt in the Garden and prayed:

“Not my will, but yours be done.”

“Not my will, but yours be done.”

“Not my will, but yours be done.”

ON THE CROSS

MARK 15:33-34 NLT

33 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock.

34 Then at three o'clock Jesus called out with a loud voice, *"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"* which means *"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"*

In the brokenness of the world, we are all too acquainted with violence... Every time we open our Facebook app or turn on the news... Just these past weeks, Syria using chemical weapons on women and children, the US striking back. ISIS bombing churches on Palm Sunday.

Since the days of Cain & Abel, humanity has known **homicide**... Since the days of Samson and King Saul, we've known **suicide**... But this moment with Jesus hanging on a cross is the first moment the universe has ever witnessed **Deicide**... When man kills God.

A bizarre and stunning consideration. Man killing his creator.

And here Jesus experiences something **for the first time** as well. Since the beginning of time, Jesus has lived in relationship. He has been loved. He has been connected. He has contributed and received from this beautiful, Divine Dance, known as the Trinity.

And for the first time, at the hand of man, He experiences separation.

A severed lifeline... Shunned from the Divine Dance, if even for a moment. And it's terrifying to Him.

For the first time in His life, He experiences abandonment.

Have you ever felt it? Have you ever felt as if God Himself had turned His back on you? Have you ever looked to a spouse or mother or father for comfort, only to be met with rejection... To reach out for an embrace only to grasp empty air.

Once again, Jesus surprises us with how human He has allowed Himself to become... And perhaps surprises Himself. Did He know how gut-wrenching this would be? Did He know that by experiencing everything common to man, that He would also experience separation from the Father?

"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" // "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

These words are terrifying to hear Jesus say... To imagine Jesus, the image of humanity perfected; experiencing abandonment by God. And actually FEELING it. This wasn't some act or charade... He might have known this was coming, but He had no idea how terrible it would be. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane for this cup of suffering to be removed... And here He experiences the fullness of this cup. Drinking it down, in all its' putrid horror.

These words that Jesus spoke in this moment of agony are a direct quote from David in Psalm 22.

PSALM 22:1; 16-18 NLT

I My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Why are you so far away when I groan for help?

If you've ever read Psalm 22, it's almost eerie... A thousand years before Jesus was born, David wrote these words. And Jesus' death was **a fulfillment of this Scripture...** And Jesus, in one last moment to teach us something, points us back to Psalm 22.

*16 My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
an evil gang closes in on me.*

They have pierced my hands and feet.

17 I can count all my bones.

My enemies stare at me and gloat.

*18 They divide my garments among themselves
and throw dice for my clothing.*

This picture that David paints is perhaps as ugly as it gets... An evil gang closes in, bones exposed, enemies mocking, pierced hands and feet...

BUT...

Psalm 22 doesn't end in tragedy.

It doesn't end in defeat.

And perhaps that's exactly what Jesus wanted us to know...

That even though it looked as if it was over... **It wasn't over.**

PSALM 22:26-27 NLT

26 The poor will eat and be satisfied.

All who seek the Lord will praise him.

Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy.

27 The whole earth will acknowledge the Lord and return to him.

All the families of the nations will bow down before him.

Psalm 22 ends in victory... *"The whole earth will acknowledge the Lord and return to Him... All the families of the nations will bow down before Him."*

What more could we ask for in the face of such ugly violence... **On the day we first saw Deicide.**

A few moments after Jesus spoke those words... **"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"**

MARK 15:37-39 NLT

37 ...Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last.

38 And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

39 When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God!"

"This man truly was the Son of God..." When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how He had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God."

A calloused, battle-scarred soldier. Someone that, for his whole life, revered those in power... The Caesars. The kings. But here in Jesus' last moments of weakness and surrender, this hardened man became a believer.

I am that Roman officer, who crucified Jesus... Only to be surprised by his own conversion.

MARY

It was when He said her name that she knew.

He said Mary, with Love, and patience and kindness and gentleness.
No one else said her name like that.

But how it could it be?

Three days had passed since she stood there, and stood with His mother and watched them crucify him.

She was at the foot of the cross when he said Father, Forgive them
And when he breathed his last breath and said it is finished

She was there after they had taken his body off the cross, and she saw Nicodemus and Joseph of Armethea boldly walk **to this tomb** with 75 pounds of spices. They wrapped him in lined cloth, and placed him in this tomb in this garden at the foot of the cross.

Early in the morning on the third day, she had come to prepare his body for burial.
But it was gone.

Where was he? Filled with grief, she went and found some of the other disciples-and when they came to the garden-- the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty, but Jesus was not there..

There was only the linen they had wrapped him in.

Now, Mary Magdalene stood once again in the garden... alone.

She was lost and full of grief...crying... and so She thought that it was the gardener who said-

“Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Mary turned... she thought he was the gardener and said...

“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

John 20:16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

What was that moment like? Did it feel like time was standing still?

Scripture says She turned toward him and cried.... she wanted to stay right there; in the garden forever...He truly was peace.

But that was not what he asked, instead

John 20:17 Jesus said “Do not hold on to me,”

Can you imagine.... don't stay and hold on me...

He told her to go

He said ...”Go find my brothers and tell them..”

She was told by Jesus to go and tell the good news...and That's what She did

.

That is what we get to do

We are his hands and feet – we are the ones chosen to share the good news... that the lost are found – the blind will see

We get to shout the gospel- that sin and death and separation from God stayed in the tomb- Jesus has won.

And now we are not who others say we are, any more than Mary was.

He calls us chosen, free- forgiven, wanted, child of the King,
His forever, held in treasure...
I am loved

When Jesus says our name he says it with more love than you can imagine.... He knows your name...He has plans for your life- plans that were created in advance for each of us...and when we know we are loved, we love others

In the garden She did not know it was Jesus until he said her name- but when he told her to go and tell the good news, she did.

In Luke 24 we see what happened after she left the garden and shared the good news. two people were walking to Emmaus

When Jesus appeared, they did not recognize him either.

But they told this stranger who appeared on the road- what they had heard. How the women had gone to the tomb that morning but didn't find his body. . How the disciples had gone and the tomb was empty. How Mary Magdalene said she saw him, she said Jesus was Alive, and had told her to go and tell them the good news.

And as they talked, Jesus began to explain all they had never understood..

They continued on the road and they invited this stranger to join them for a meal,

And as Jesus sat at the table with his friends, and he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.

When he did – their eyes were opened...and they knew that Jesus was alive...just as he had said. The grave could not hold him.

Jesus rose from the grave and gave all of us, the whole world, a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins.

I am Mary. And God has given me, and you, the task of telling everyone who He is and what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right.

Do you believe that today? God is for you, He hears us when we pray. He is with us.

Luke says- when Jesus broke the bread their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, and said "It is true! The Lord has risen.

In the Garden, Jesus said her name- Mary.... She knew it was Jesus, she knew that He knew her and loved her

And this morning, the Easter story tells us God knows you.

No matter who you are, what you've done or what's been done to you- Jesus loves you. He paid the price on the cross for you and for me- while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

He knows your name.

We are His hands and feet, helping people find their way back to God.

His sacrifice that Friday brought us back to God. Each week we have a chance to celebrate the forgiveness that was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:16 (The Message)

So that When we drink the cup of blessing, we are taking into ourselves the blood, the very life, of Christ... And it is the same with the loaf of bread we break and eat... we take into ourselves the body, the very life, of Christ?

The gospel says ... We don't reduce Christ to what we are; he raises us to who he is.

That is my prayer today, we would understand the awesome power of Jesus, and how he is making us a new creation- the old is gone, the new has come...

That we would leave this place knowing

So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NLT)

We are Christ's Ambassadors.. Pleading with those who are far from God, come back to the God who made you and loves you and knows your name.

And when Jesus broke the bread and gave thanks- the disciples knew it was Jesus. Today- we invite you take the bread and the cup and remember what we celebrate today- Christ died for our sins, but on the third day He rose, He sits at the right hand of God the Father and He intercedes for you and me.

So this morning

We can share in this meal that we have celebrated as members of one body, the church, for over 2,000 years...

We give thanks, because Jesus has brought us back to God

Communion is a time of remembering and celebrating. We have bread and juice at the tables around this worship space. You are also welcome to sit and use this time for reflection.

DOUBTING THOMAS

Everything had happened so fast. Just 3 nights before they had gathered in this very room and Jesus, their Teacher and friend had broken bread with them, saying “*This is My body*” and passed wine, saying, “*This is My blood.*” And they had puzzled over what he meant.

They soon found out. The rapid-fire events of the weekend had stunned them. As Jesus was being arrested in the Garden, they had run for their lives. They watched in utter disbelief as their leader had been nailed to a Cross. He was dead. The dream of a new Kingdom of God was over. Now what? Back to fishing? They were gathered in this Upper Room talking, weeping, consoling one another, simply trying to process it all.

That morning, the Mary’s had run into the room all flustered and out of breath, talking at the same time, “We have seen the Lord! He is risen!”

At first the disciples didn’t buy it. They loved & respected these women, but maybe their grief had led to hallucinations! Still... Jesus had spoken about something like this happening... so Peter & John ran to check out their story... and it was true! The tomb was empty! Where was the body?! Where was Jesus?

It was Sunday evening now, and they were all in the room... except for Thomas who had gone out to buy groceries. The door was locked. What if they were next? What if the soldiers came to round up all of Jesus’ followers? What if...

But then **He** was there... Jesus! in the room... with them. “*Peace be with you!*” He said. And their jaws hit the floor. It couldn’t be!!! They had watched Him die! They had seen His cold body being wrapped up and laid in a tomb... He was Dead!

“*Peace be with You.*” He opened his hands so they could see the wounds. It was Him! He was alive! Then he said,

“These are the words that I spoke to you while I was with you... that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations.”

Can you imagine? Their grief and despair instantly transformed to joy and hope! When Jesus left, they must have talked long into the night about what all this meant.

But one of them had not been there. **Thomas**. And when he returned, they excitedly told him about the Lord’s appearance, that he was alive, and that they were going to be His witnesses... and... but Thomas stopped them and said, “*Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will **never** believe!*”

Can you blame Thomas? He’d gone all in with this Jesus. Left his home, his family, his livelihood to follow and learn from this man. He’d believed every word Jesus had spoken about the New Kingdom of God coming... and he couldn’t wait... he could taste it! He believed in this Man! But all that had come to a crushing halt. They’d killed Him. Jesus was dead. And with Him the dream of that new Kingdom had also died. Thomas was crushed.

I think a lot of people today are like Thomas, doubting, but only because they are heartbroken. Unwilling or maybe just afraid to believe in a loving God because life has dealt them such a crushing defeat... or many. They don’t see the Kingdom... they don’t feel it. So why believe? I get it. People need much

more than words today. People need to see for themselves... to touch with their own hands... to experience the Kingdom of God... to experience Jesus.

In Thomas' case it happened a week later. The disciples were back in their hideout... Thomas with them this time, and again, Jesus appeared in their midst...

"Peace be with you," he said. Then he focused on Thomas and said, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.

Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

"My Lord and my God!" That's Thomas' prayer... it's spontaneous, it's gut level. It's a prayer of **joy**, and a prayer of **hope**. Jesus is alive! It's all true! And that means His New Kingdom is real...

- Where guilt-ridden people find forgiveness... and dare to forgive others!
- Where broken people experience God's unconditional love, and begin to love others in the same way!
- Where justice and righteousness are real,
- Where all human beings are equal,
- Where God is again among His people, like it was in Eden... even better!

"My Lord and my God!" It's a prayer of joy and hope in God's kingdom. It's also a prayer of **surrender**.

- When a person's **will** surrenders to Jesus as Lord and King.
- When a person's **reason** bows before the infinitude of God.
- When human **stubbornness** and **pride** are revealed and laid down at the feet of Christ.

I am Thomas. Of all the disciples, he's the one I most relate to. I was so skeptical... even hostile towards any idea of God. I trusted only in evidence and reasoning, and whatever could give me a few moments of pleasure... And yet in one moment, all my skepticism and hostility and fear... and pride... were swept away, as I opened my heart just a crack... and God's truth and love flooded in.

Just a crack. Can you do that? I know it's hard. I've been there. To open your heart just a crack is a scary thing. But what if it's all true? What if God really is there? What if Jesus really did rise from the dead and is alive? What if His Kingdom really is here now and coming soon?!

"My Lord and my God!" Can you open your heart just a crack to the possibility that He is Lord and God?!

- That He can and does and will forgive all your sins?
- That He can and does and will heal broken hearts...
- That He raises up the down-trodden...
- unchains the addicted...
- and brings justice to those unfairly treated...
- Can you open your heart just a crack to the possibility that His Kingdom of truth and love is here now and open for you?

"My Lord and my God!"

And to you who are now and have been faithful followers of Christ for years, perhaps even decades, praying **"My Lord and my God!"** means

- Desiring to live as Jesus lived,

- To love as Jesus loved,
- To bring Jesus into the dark places of this world, and
- To do everything you can to help people find their way back to God.

You don't need complex and heady theology to do that. You just need a totally surrendered heart. ***“My Lord and my God!”***

Jesus said to Thomas, *“You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”*

Let's Pray...

Rather than just pray for you, I'd like to give you a moment to pray. Perhaps you'd like to pray, ***“My Lord and my God!”*** as a way of opening your heart to Jesus for the first time. Or perhaps you'd like to pray it as a way of completely surrendering your heart to Jesus and saying to Him that you are willing to be His witness here and now, in the dark places of the world.

Lord, it would be a lot easier, I suppose, if You were to appear physically right here right now among us and we were all to see you with our own eyes and hear You with our own ears. I imagine that about 100% of us in this room would immediately bow down and exclaim, “My Lord and my God!”

But you said, *“Blessed are those who believe without seeing Me.”* And that is us. So it falls to us to trust You... to take the risk to open our hearts just a crack, to bow before You and pray as our own prayer, “My Lord... and my God! Jesus!”

Only Your Holy Spirit can move hearts. And I pray that You would... just like You did in me 40 years ago. Open hearts... just a crack... and flood us with your truth and love and peace.

In the Name of Jesus, our Resurrected King, Amen.