

It is now Thursday in Holy Week. And after Jesus has finished with the Passover meal, he is now going out to the Mount of Olives with his disciples. The Mount of Olives being a hill on the east side of Jerusalem. If you were to stand on it and look westward, you'd be looking straight at the temple. But it is here that Jesus wants to go in order to pray, to prepare for what is to come.

But on the way, he says to his disciples, verse 27: "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.'" And Jesus is quoting the prophet Zechariah, who 500 years ago knew exactly what was going to happen on this night. The prophet Zechariah saw in the Spirit that Jesus would be abandoned, forsaken even by his closest friends, and he would have to suffer alone for the sins of the world. This is what was about to happen, and this is what Jesus is warning his disciples about.

But Peter doesn't want to accept that. Peter says to him, verse 29: "Even though they all fall away, I will not." Peter promises that he's going to stay with Jesus. Peter promises that no matter what happens he is going to be faithful to his Master. Peter promises that he will stick with him until the end. And I have no doubt that Peter meant what he said in this moment. He was serious. He wanted to stay with Jesus, no matter what.

But Jesus shows Peter the truth. He says to him, verse 30: "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." You have to realize when Jesus said this, it was almost the middle of the night on Maundy Thursday. They were going out to the Mount of Olives at that time. So what Jesus is telling Peter is that: "Even before this morning comes, you will deny me." Not even six hours from now, Peter would not only fall, but he would turn away from his Lord in shame three times. This, he says, is what will happen.

But Peter insists, verse 31: "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And the other disciples even agree with him. They are going to stick with Jesus. They want to remain faithful to the end, even despite what Zechariah had said. I'm sure they meant it, but they didn't realize the cost that it would have.

And Christians, it is all too easy for us to look down on Peter here. Because we know how the story goes. We know what's going to happen. And we would probably even say, "Peter, how could you be so foolish? Don't you know that in just a few short hours you're going to fall away? Don't you know what's about to happen? How could you promise to be faithful when you are about to fall in such a short time? Peter, we simply don't understand why you did what you did." But Christians, do you not see yourselves here in Peter? Because when we look at Peter, we are looking into a mirror. Because how often have we made similar promises when it was easy to do so? A promise to be faithful, a promise to stand up for the truth, a promise to endure to the end, a promise to turn away from sin, whatever it may be? I'm sure we meant it when we made those promises, but we hadn't experienced the cost. Because it's easy to promise things when times are good. But when the testing comes--and it will come--will we be faithful to those promises?

If, for example, we made a promise to stand up for God, to always speak the truth, to always tell people what God says, I'm sure we meant it when we made that promise. But what happens when we're face-to-face with someone, having to tell them the truth of God's Word, especially someone we love? Or to tell them about a sin that they are committing. How often, in that

moment, do we feel that temptation to just hold back a little bit, to not really say things as clearly as we should? To just kind of hedge it around a little bit so it's easier to hear, because we don't want to hurt them? We don't want to offend them with what we say. But in that moment, Christians, we are feeling the temptation of Peter.

Or perhaps we've made a promise to listen to what Jesus says, to do what he wants us to do no matter what. And I'm sure we meant it when we made that promise. But what happens when that promise means that we have to give something up? To stop doing something we know to be wrong, especially something we've been doing for a very long time? Suddenly, we feel a temptation to make excuses, to show why Jesus didn't really mean what he said when he was talking about this, because it's different for me somehow. But in that moment, Christians, we are feeling the temptation of Peter.

Or perhaps we made a promise to stop doing some sin, that we're going to fight against it, that we aren't going to fall into that anymore. And I'm sure we meant it when we made that promise. But how often do we find ourselves suddenly falling into it again, especially when we weren't expecting it, when we weren't paying attention like we should? In that moment, Christians, we are feeling the temptation of Peter.

So yes, Christians, we are not that different from Peter. It's easy to make promises when times are good. But when the testing comes--and it will come--will we remain faithful to that promise?

But now Jesus goes to Gethsemane, a small orchard on the Mount of Olives. And he leaves behind most of the disciples in order to go pray, to prepare for what is to come. And he takes only three of his disciples along with him: Peter, James, and John. But it is here that he begins to feel the weight of what he has to bear. Jesus' suffering has begun. Jesus is beginning to mentally suffer the weight of all the sins of the world. And is it any wonder, Christians, that Jesus is troubled in this moment? Because think of it this way. Do you feel the weight of your own sin? The weight of every evil thing that you have done, the weight of every evil thing you have said, the weight of every evil thing that you have thought? If you had to pay for that sin yourself, would you take it lightly? If you had to suffer that sin of your own, would you think that it was nothing at all? If you do think it's nothing, then you don't fully understand just how serious this debt is. But Jesus is not suffering for his own sin. He didn't have any. Jesus isn't even suffering the sin of just one other person. That would be bad enough. Jesus is suffering the weight of every single sin that has ever been committed. Every man, woman, and child in all the history of the world, every evil thing that they have done is being laid on Jesus in this moment. We can't even begin to imagine the agony that Jesus has to endure, bearing the weight of all of that sin.

So leaving behind his three disciples, Jesus falls on the ground alone. And he cries out to the Father, asking for him to take this cup from him. Let this hour pass. Maybe that confuses us. Maybe we ask, "Why? Jesus knows that he's going to rise from the dead. Jesus knows how it's going to go down. Why would he ask the Father to take this away from him?" Because Jesus, unlike Peter, fully understands the cost of what he is promising. Jesus is fully aware of what he is going to have to endure. Because God the Father is about to pour out his wrath on his own Son. And Jesus is about to suffer in a way that no man ever has or ever will. Jesus knows what his promises are going to cost. He knows what he has to suffer. Because mystery of all mysteries,

Christians! The Father is turning his back on the Son. Jesus is suffering alone, forsaken even by the Father that our sins might be repaid. We cannot even imagine what that was like for him to bear that weight in that moment. So it's no surprise that he's troubled. He is human, after all. And he asks for the cup to be taken away.

But Jesus does not waver. Even despite knowing the cost, he submits to the Father's will. He says, "Not my will, but yours be done." Jesus will drink this cup, as bitter as it is. And even though the Father has turned away so that our sins might be forgiven, Jesus does not falter. He remains steadfast in the midst of the trial, fully prepared to suffer as no one else has. Because even though the disciples waver and fall asleep, Jesus does not. Jesus promises what he is about to do, knowing full well the terrible cost--and he still does it. And thanks be to God that he did, because he did it that we would be forgiven.

So go, Christians. Go to dark Gethsemane. Whether you have stood firm or whether you have failed like Peter, go to dark Gethsemane. There your Redeemer's conflict see. There see your salvation being won for you. The Son being forsaken in that moment so that you wouldn't have to be. Learn from Jesus Christ what it means to be faithful. Learn from Jesus Christ what it means to be steadfast. Learn from Jesus Christ to pray even in the midst of your trials. And God himself will strengthen you so that you will be able to keep your promises on the day of temptation.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, you suffered for us in Gethsemane that we might be forgiven. Teach us to remain steadfast under trial and to endure all things for your sake, so that we may remain faithful until the end; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.