

3 April 2023
Holy Monday Meditation

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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Text: Matthew 26:36-46

In the Name of (+) Jesus. Amen.

It hadn't been that long ago that the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Now, it was Jesus doing the asking; asking His disciples to watch with Him and to pray with Him. For He was **sorrowful and troubled**. And these were His friends. And this is what friends do. They pray for one another.

Jesus went on a little farther than Peter, James, and John. I wonder how far it was. If they could hear His prayer or not. I wonder, too, how long did they pray? How long before they fell asleep? And not just the first time, but the second time and the third time as well. Try as they might, no matter how much they wanted to stay awake with Jesus, each time, they could not do it. They could not stay awake. They could not watch and pray. **The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak**, Jesus said. Yes, how weak they were.

How weak we are, too. And not just when it comes to praying, but in all facets of our lives, when it comes to keeping the Word and Law of God.

My spirit *wants* to have no other gods, but how often my flesh does, in fact, fear, love, and trust in something besides the true God.

My spirit *wants* to honor God's name, but how often my weak flesh dishonors Him by what I say and do, or fail to say and do.

My spirit *wants* to hold God's Word sacred, and gladly hear and learn it, but how often my weak flesh forgets what I have heard, and gladly hears and learns the words and thinking and truths of the world instead.

And my spirit *wants* to love my neighbor as myself, but how often my flesh wants my neighbor to love me as I love myself.

We can't do it. Try as we might, no matter how much we want to do what we know we should and be a good Christian, how often are we instead asleep at the wheel? Or letting satan steer us where we should not go, and instead of resisting temptation, entering into it? St. Paul experienced this conflict, this turmoil, in his own life, finally moaning: *O wretched man that I am!* (Romans 7:24) Yes, wretched is how Peter, James, and John must have felt that night in the Garden. What kind of friends were they? Not very good ones.

It is good to know that. That we're not good. It's a hard truth, but a good one. That we not look for goodness in ourselves or our own efforts, but in the only one who is good - in Jesus.

He is the one who had no other gods.
He is the one who honored God's name in all He said and did.
He is the one who gladly heard and learned God's Word.
He is the one who loved His neighbor as Himself.
He is the one whose spirit and flesh were in perfect agreement.

Even while in agony in the Garden called Gethsemane, facing a cruel and torturous death, He did not waver, He did not sin. As He always had done, He submitted to His Father's will. His Father's good and gracious will. For Jesus' crucifixion, while not easy, was good. God acting graciously for the good of the world.

Three times Jesus went away from His disciples and prayed.
Just as three times Pilate announced that He was *not guilty*.
And just as He would spend three days in the tomb after His death.

And then, after three times praying, He arose and gave Himself into the hands of His betrayer.
After three innocent verdicts, He ascended the cross.
And after three days in the tomb, He rose from the dead.

Jesus did what we could not and could never do. He led a perfect life in every way, and then drank the cup of suffering and wrath His Father gave Him - the cup we deserved, but He drank in our place. That instead, we get to drink the cup of blessing, the cup filled with His blood for the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of salvation and eternal life.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

We see that tonight, in Peter, James, and John, and in ourselves.
Thank God *the Word became flesh* (John 1:14). That now there is human flesh that is willing and not weak, but strong - strong to save. The flesh of Jesus for the life of the world. The flesh of Jesus that He gives, this week, for you.

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