

Text: Luke 22:39-44 Midweek Lent. March 26/27, 2014.

See how much Jesus loves you! Amen!

Four years ago, I had the privilege to take a trip to the Holy Land. I got to see some really cool stuff. I got to see the place where the Lord was born. I got to put my hand into the spot where Jesus' cross was placed. I got to walk into the tomb where Jesus was buried and rose again. I got to see the place where Jesus was born, died, rose. But honestly, another place stands at least equal with those, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Garden of Passion. Maybe it's because the place was quieter, less crowded, but I had the chance to kneel by the rock where Jesus knelt, spend a few quiet moments reading my Bible where Jesus prayed. Seriously I could smell the sweat and see the blood falling from Jesus' brow and onto the ground. I still shudder when I think about being there. I distinctly remember while I was kneeling at the rock where Jesus prayed, so focused I was practically in a trance. But one of my friends on the trip broke the silence with the perfect words, the words I was thinking right then. "See how much he loves us!" There was just something about being there that really struck us. See how much he loves us. Tonight we are going to go back to that garden of passion, the garden of Gethsemane and see how much he loves us! See how much he loves us!

Here's the thing. Jesus didn't have to go through all this suffering. Jesus didn't even have to come to earth in the first place. Jesus could have stayed in heaven and stayed in his perfect home and it would still have been perfect. But for Jesus, heaven was not complete without you. Jesus wants you in heaven so badly, he left heaven and came to earth and not just for a passing visit. He came to endure our pain, our suffering, our guilt, our sin. And he did it all willingly. He went out *as usual* to the Mount of Olives. He went to the place where he knew his enemies could easily find him. He had gone to this place many times before so Judas would know the exact location. Jesus went willingly, as usual. See how much he loves you!

See how much he loves you, he begged his disciples, and us, pray that you will not fall into temptation. That's good advice all the time. Why now? What temptation? The temptation of seeing Jesus weak and suffering and dying and thinking, "He can't be the Savior!" The temptation of abandoning Jesus when he's in trouble? The temptation to listen to the devil and take the easy way out and run away when times got tough following Jesus? Jesus doesn't say. He just says, "temptation." Any temptation, every temptation, all temptation.

And how easily we have fallen into temptation. Jesus, your church is shrinking. Your world listens to you less and less. Why don't you do something? Maybe you aren't real after all. Jesus, don't you care that I'm sick? Don't you notice that I'm suffering? Why didn't you listen when we prayed for dad to get better? Maybe you aren't so great after all. Then the devil says, "Come on, follow me. It's easy. Everyone's doing it. I'll show you what happiness and fun are really like!" And we listen to the devil before we fall into temptation.

And we listen to the devil after we fall. That's called guilt. That devil is a tricky bugger. Before we sin, he convinces us, "It's no big deal. It's just a little one. No one will notice." Then after sin, he raises the voice of guilt! "That sin is too big! God could never love you! You call yourself a Christian! Better not call yourself that anymore! Your whole life is a lie!" You know that voice of guilt. One lost temper at a family gathering. One mean word you can't unsay. One moment of adultery, one second of lust. And the guilt goes on and on and on and on and on.

Now you can see how much Jesus loves you! Jesus came to take away your guilt. Jesus came to take your guilt on himself! Jesus took that guilt, gladly, willingly. Jesus took all the guilt for all the sins of all the people of all time. All the guilt of all the sins of all the people of all time. I think we need to hear that again, to quiet the devil's voice of guilt. Jesus took all the guilt for all the sins of all the people of all time. Can you imagine that guilt!? Can you imagine that suffering!? See how much he loves you! He took all the guilt of all the sins of all the people of all time.

He suffered. He drank the cup. This was not easy. And remember Jesus was a real human being, who felt pain, who knew what was coming. He sweat. Sweat was one of the curses of sin. Jesus not only carrying guilt, but carrying the curse of sin. Jesus bled. He prayed so earnestly, so fervently, his sweat was like drops of blood. Stop for a second. Picture the face of Jesus, straining, stretching, bleeding. Smell the sweat that pours down his face. See the drops of blood and maybe not just drops. The word means clots, clumps, thick clots, nasty clots of coagulated blood splattering the ground, staining this stone, smearing Jesus' face, getting in his eyes. See how much he loves you! See how much he endured for you!

It was agony! All the guilt. All the curse. All the punishment for all the sins, on his shoulders, overwhelming his soul with sorrow to the point of death, wishing, wanting, praying that if there is any other way, that the cup pass by, that he not have to drink. But there isn't any other way. The cup can't pass by. He has to drink it. He has to drain it. And once it's clear that God's will is for Jesus to drink, to drain this cup, we find only resolve in Jesus. See how much he loves you! There is no more agony. No more prayers for the cup to pass, only resolve to drink it, to drain it. See how much he loves you! He drank. He drained.

See how much he loves you. The angels that came did not fight for Jesus! The angels strengthened Jesus for Jesus to fight. Alone. How he longed for the company of his friends. And how they left him all alone. Sleeping. Running away. Hiding behind locked doors. Jesus had to suffer alone. See how much he loves you! How he longed for the company of his Father. Yet in those horrible hours on the cross, even Jesus had to cry out, "My God (not my Father), my God, why have you forsaken me! Why have you left me all alone?" Why? Because Jesus loved you so much he went to hell alone, so you won't have to go there. He suffered for sin alone so you won't have to suffer for sin. He drank the cup alone so you won't have to drink it. He fought the battle alone, so you can share in the victory. See how much he loves you! He fought the battle against sin and won! And you get the victory in heaven. He fought the battle against the devil and won! And you get to enjoy the spoils for all eternity. See how much he loves you!

I would love to take all of you to this Garden of passion so you could all see first hand just how much Jesus loves you. Maybe I can't. But God can and will take all of you who trust in Jesus to heaven. There you will see just how much Jesus loves you. Amen.