

## Gethsemane and Easter

The night Jesus was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, on Thursday night before Easter, has come to be known as Maundy Thursday. The word “Maundy” means “command”, and harks to the command of Jesus to “love one another as I have loved you.”

When placed against the world-changing backdrop of Easter, Gethsemane speaks volumes about what happened, and about what must continue to happen when we live as disciples of the risen Jesus. The prayers in the garden by Jesus that night, so fervent that drops of blood came from his brow, the disciples falling asleep during the long prayer time, Jesus waking them up, and the arrest in the Garden, the scenes are all about the intensity with which God loves us, the lengths he will go to save us because of that love.

Three times they fell asleep during Jesus’ time of prayer. Three times he woke them up. Three times Peter denied Jesus in the courtyard. How many times will it take until we finally get it?

Easter in its essence is really about eternal communion with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. “Wake up!” Jesus says. “I was praying for you that night, and I pray for you today. My death and resurrection are about our being together forever!”

The early morning trip to the tomb must have been eye opening for Mary and the disciples. Doubtless they did not sleep much that night, for they thought Jesus had indeed left them and they would never see him again.

But they did see him. And the risen Lord Jesus, who appears to the women at the tomb, to the disciples in the same upper room where they had spent time before Gethsemane, and to thousands of others, is to say, “I indeed will be with you forever.”

The olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane have been tested to be over a thousand years old. Some think they are the original trees that were there when Jesus prayed, there outside Jerusalem at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

The love of God was evident in that moment two thousand years ago, and it is evident now. God showed his love by sending his son Jesus to die for us. He further showed his power by raising him from the dead. And even further, he shows both by walking with us and waking us up when we fall asleep in the work and ministry of the gospel today.

The name Gethsemane means “olive press.” The traditional way to press olives is with a large stone shaped like a wheel. It is so heavy it takes a mule or donkey to move the stone over the olives and crush them beneath it. Then the mixture is placed in a special olive press, which “presses” the oil from the olives further. The olives have to go through several stages of “pressing” before they are the pure olive oil which is the final result.

Perhaps, dear reader, the stone which was rolled away from the tomb is the same stone which presses us to be even purer, even more holy Christians. It opens up our world to possibilities never before thought possible.

Gethsemane, as Jesus wakes his disciples to travel with him, is in essence a huge olive press. Easter, as the resurrection of Jesus, wrings from us all the impurities of sin and at the same time turns us from potential Christians into actual Christians. Before the stone covered the tomb, now, it is rolled away so that we can walk out to new life which some never thought possible.

The difficulties and trials we face as human beings are a sort of olive press, and God can use those moments to shape and form us into the kind of Christians who are full of patience, love, faith, and hope. Easter frees us from thinking of trials, even death as powers of which God does not have power.

Gethsemane, with all of its darkness and pain and love, was the threshold to see Easter as the sunrising, daybreaking, sin-destroying, miracle making, eternal, Christianity in which faith steps to the middle of the day. Today it is the same.

So on this Easter day, we celebrate without people who were there a year ago. We also are joined by others who we did not even know or were not yet born. The celebration of the resurrection, the flowering of the cross, the alleluias, and the “he is risen greetings” bring hope to everyone. Let us embrace the present moment, and trust God to make it the most wonderful it could possibly be.

From Bethlehem to Gethsemane, from Jerusalem to Heaven, in all the places you travel wherever you might read these words, let God press and purify you to be an Easter Christian who walks, serves, and talks with the risen Lord, so that others might meet him.