

29th July 2020

Luke 22:39-46

It's an ordinary day, right?

Well, as ordinary as could be expected. It's the time of the Passover, an annual festival, so it's not just a Tuesday during term-time, but there are customs that the people are used to following, year after year. It is a bit unusual inasmuch as Jesus has come to Jerusalem to celebrate with his friends, and he's also been making some odd pronouncements about 'the end coming', but, as he and his disciples make their way to the Mount of Olives to pray, there's no reason to think that anything earth-shattering is about to occur.

This is the view as far as the disciples are concerned. Of course, Jesus knows that he is about to be betrayed by Judas and that this time of prayer in the garden will be his last before his arrest and eventual crucifixion. It is significant, then, that Jesus chooses to spend this precious time in conversation with God. That is how important prayer is for him, personally; he knows that he needs to pray in order to have the strength for what is coming. However, it is not only his own strength that concerns Jesus in this situation.

All three of the synoptic gospels record Jesus telling his disciples, in this moment, to pray that they do not come to the 'time of trial'. Jesus doesn't just think that his own time is best spent in prayer; he thinks, even at a moment of extreme stress, that the best thing the disciples can do is pray too. Specifically, they should ask God not to be tested. 'Time of trial' is translated as 'temptation' in the King James bible, and this – combined with 'time of trial' – gives a sense of Jesus' meaning. He is being tested himself, having to determine to carry out God's plan, and the disciples should pray to avoid the trial he is facing.

The disciples don't recognise the significance of the moment, so Jesus tells them what they should be doing. In the garden of Gethsemane, he shows them what they should be doing. He tells them; he shows them: pray.

We, like the disciples, are unable to see exactly what lies ahead of us, but we do know, from the example of Jesus, that prayer will instil in us the courage and resolve to face even the most difficult of situations. We should pray to God that we do not have to face the temptation that Jesus faced, knowing that that conversation with our creator is what will sustain us should the path ahead be difficult to negotiate.

'Loving God, as we look ahead to an uncertain future, we ask that you will remind to spend time in conversation with you, so that we will have the strength to face whatever situations we face. Amen.'