

## “Places of the Passion: The Garden of Gethsemane”

**Isaiah 53: 1-7** 1 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. 4 Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 WE all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

**Matthew 26: 47-56** 47 While He was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” 49 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

50 Jesus replied, “Do what you came for, friend.” Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested Him. 51 With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

52 “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would Scriptures fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

55 In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56 But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

**Ephesians 2: 11-20** 11 Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called “uncircumcised heathens” by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. 12 In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. 13 But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. 14 For Christ Himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, He broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.

When sailors describe a storm that no one can escape, they often call it a perfect storm. Not perfect in the sense of ideal, but perfect in the sense of its combining factors. Combining factors like hurricane-force winds and a cold front and rain and a high tide. The hurricane-force winds alone would be impossible. But hurricane-force winds and a cold front and rain and a high tide? A perfect storm!

We don't need to be sailors to experience a perfect storm. All we need is a layoff and a recession and a child going away to college; a disease and a divorce and a parent with dementia; a relationship breakup and a college rejection letter and a C- in calculus. We can usually handle one challenge, but two or three or four at a time? A bomb-cyclone and a polar vortex? Gale-force winds and thunderstorms and hail? These kinds of perfect storms drive us to our knees, remind us of our helplessness, and point us to the Creator who has promised to be with us always and never leave or forsake us.

**[NOTE 1]** We're in a series in called Places of the Passion. Today we walk with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane is the place of a perfect storm of epic proportions! Betrayal and an arrest, an assault and desertion—all leading to death by crucifixion.

The crowd collects. "While Christ was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people." (Matthew 26:48) Matthew doesn't mention Romans, that's because Romans won't come into the picture until the next day—that's when they will mock Jesus, flog Jesus and crucify Jesus. The crowd that collects here is a crowd of Jews—the chief priests (who controlled the temple) and elders (who were rulers of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish senate of seventy). This is like the Supreme Court and congress sending the FBI to arrest you!

Who's leading this Jewish posse with so much firepower and muscle? Judas! And what is Judas up to? Betrayal. Every time we celebrate Holy Communion we hear the words, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when he was betrayed." This is that night!

"Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.' And he came up to Jesus at once and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend do what you came to do.'" (Matthew 26:49–50) The Jewish posse wouldn't be able to recognize Jesus at night. Judas, therefore, gives them a sign—a greeting and a kiss.

In Matthew's gospel, the term "friend" also appears in Matthew 20:13 to describe a person in a parable who rejects grace for other people. It also comes in Matthew 22:12 to describe a person in a parable who isn't wearing a wedding garment. A "friend," therefore is a friend in name only. This is Judas!

The chaos commences. "And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear." (Matthew 26:51) John's Gospel tells us it was Peter who drew his sword; that the slave's name was Malchus; that Peter cut off Malchus' right ear (John 18:10). The crowd collects and the chaos commences. It's a perfect storm!

Are you bouncing up and down in a perfect storm? Are you doing everything you can to survive? Have you battened-down the hatches? Lowered the anchor? Consulted the bank? Changed your diet? Called an attorney? Tightened your budget? Gone into counseling or rehab or therapy? Yet the sea still is churning? And the waves are still coming? Don't give up! Don't ever give up! Why? **[NOTE 2]**

The control is clear. Whose control? Christ's control! It's very clear! Judas and the Jews appear to be running things. Let me accent the word appear. Christ is really the one in control! How so?

"Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?'" (Matthew 26:52–53) The control is clear! When his enemies come, Christ goes out to meet them. When Judas approaches, Christ doesn't run. When Peter strikes Malchus, Christ commands Peter to put his sword away.

Jesus says in John 10:18, "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own accord." Though the powers of darkness rise against him—full throttle—Christ is in control. He could ask his Father for twelve legions of angels. Twelve legions of angels? There were 6,000 men in one Roman legion. Do the math— $12 \times 6,000 = 72,000$  angels! Christ doesn't need 72,000 angels because Christ is in absolute control!

During WW II, psychologists compared ground troops with fighter pilots. They determined that after sixty days of continuous combat, the anxiety of ground troops was off the charts. After sixty days, though, an astounding 93% of fighter pilots were happy and at peace. Why is that? The fighter pilots had control! They had their hands on the throttle! Ground troops, on the other hand, felt forlorn and helpless. They could just as easily be killed standing still or running away. What's the point? Popular wisdom tells us, "Always seek control!"

We don't need a war to prove it! All we need is a backup on the interstate highway! A team of German researchers recently found that a traffic jam triples our chances of a heart attack. That makes sense because in slow traffic we lose control. That's why popular wisdom repeatedly tells us, "Always seek control!"

So what's the plan when a perfect storm hits? "Always seek control!" Never board a plane without a parachute. Never leave the house without a gas mask. Never step on a crack lest you break your mother's back! That's it! Face every storm by taking control!

There's only one problem with this popular wisdom. It doesn't work! Would you like something that does work when you're in a perfect storm? Rather than seek control, relinquish control—give it all up. Let go. Resign as CEO of the universe. Give your entire mess to Jesus. Look what Mark 4:41 says, "Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Christ's control is clear!

**[NOTE 4]** The calm is contagious. "But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?' ... All this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples left him and fled." (Matthew 26:54, 56) Christ is

calm because he trusts the Scriptures. The Scriptures that predicted all of these events. Scriptures like Zechariah 11:12, “They weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver.” Zechariah 12:10, “They will look on me, on him whom they have pierced.” Zechariah 13:7, “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”

In a Peanuts comic strip, Lucy is struggling with her Sunday School memory verse. Finally, she says, “Maybe it’s a verse from the book of Reevaluations.” The book of Re-evaluations!

The Scriptures are a book of reevaluations. They help us reevaluate who is really in control. Christ is in control of sin—and forgives every last one of them. Christ is in control of our prayers—he answers them according to his loving plan. Christ is in control of our heavy burdens—he takes them all to the cross!

When parents send their children to a camp they often have to sign a form that asks, who is the responsible party? If Johnny breaks his arm or Suzie gets the measles, who is the responsible party? So a parent signs their name. [NOTE 5]

Christ signed his name for us—and he wrote it in his own blood. When the perfect storm hits, Jesus is the responsible party. Not us. It’s his job to see us through. Christ is the Shepherd, we are the sheep. Christ is the Bridegroom, we are the bride. Christ is the Rabbi, we are his disciples.

One of three things is happening in our lives right now. We are either heading for a perfect storm or we are in a perfect storm or we just went through a perfect storm. No matter what, we don’t have to become hopeless or anxious or faithless. We don’t have to worry! We can stay calm. Why? In a perfect storm, Jesus delivers perfect peace. Amen.

**Sermon Notes for “Places of the Passion: the Garden of Gethsemane”**  
**based on Matthew 26: 47-56, Isaiah 53: 1-7, and Ephesians 2: 11-20**  
**Given at Doster Community Church March 19, 2023**

- I. In the Garden of Gethsemane a “perfect storm” comes together on Thursday night: a betrayal, an arrest, an assault, and desertion all leading to death by crucifixion.
- II. No matter what “perfect storm” you may be going through, life may be throwing at you, don’t give up! Jesus is in control!
- III. Popular wisdom tells us, “always seek control.” It doesn’t work. Following Jesus is not easy. It requires us to be different. Jesus tells us to give up control. Give it all to Jesus!
- IV. The peace and calm of Jesus is contagious. Jesus is calm because He trusts the Scriptures.
- V. Jesus takes responsibility for us if we will let Him. Christ signed His name, ...in blood on the permission slip of life. He is the good shepherd! What are you going to do about it? What is your “I will \_\_\_\_\_” statement?