

*When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.*

*Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.*

*Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he."*

*Judas, who betrayed him was standing with them.*

*When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell down to the ground. So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go."*

*This was to fulfill the word he had spoken: "of those whom you gave me I have not lost one."*

*Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter,*

*"Put your sword back in its sheath; shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"*

*So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First, they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.*

***John 18:1-14***

### **"Whom Do You Seek?"**

Pastor Stephen Ridge

We've spent most of the month listening to and thinking about this prayer Jesus offered during a pause he and his men took before crossing the Kidron Ravine and entering the Garden of Gethsemane. Real time, it probably took Jesus less than ten minutes to offer this prayer, but it is the best glimpse the gospels give us of the dynamic that existed between Jesus and the Father, the glory they shared in heaven from all eternity past, the love Father and Son and Spirit had always borne for each other and the ways that love had always extended to us, just how much and in what way Father, Son and Spirit have always loved us.

It is so deep and so real that we've spent three weeks thinking and talking about it, and I don't think we've wasted a moment. We could spend three more weeks thinking on Jesus' prayer and barely begin to understand it. But with our Call to Worship this morning, Jesus' prayer ends and John's gospel dramatically and suddenly picks up speed. We learn in the other gospels that, in the garden, Jesus would spend another hour or two in prayer, long enough for all the disciples to fall asleep on him. And the other gospels tell us that in those last hours before his arrest, after having prayed for all of us, Jesus would pray for himself, disciplining his own soul, mastering his own flesh, so that, however he felt, he was able to say to his Father, *"Not my will, but your will be done."*

But, strangely, once Jesus arrives in the garden, John's gospel can't be bothered with any of that. Perhaps because John's gospel was written decades after the others, and the Not-My-Will prayer had already become legendary. So John treats Jesus' arrival in the garden as almost a tactical situation. The apostle tells us that Jesus had deliberately led his men to a place that Judas would have known they were likely to be. That night, Judas served as a scout. And some number of Roman soldiers were placed under the command of a few *"servants"* of the chief priests and rabbi's. Not servants in the sense of table waiters! These men were experienced slaves who had risen to positions of authority in the temple complex. They were slaves but they were in command.

And their approach to the Garden fairly lit up whatever path they took to intercept Jesus and his disciples there. John speaks of them carrying *"lanterns and torches and weapons."* They clearly expected Jesus and his men to flee at the sight of them, and they were prepared to light up the landscape flushing Jesus and his men out of the brush where they expected him to hide. But the situation breaks in a way they never imagined. Jesus doesn't run, he strides toward the garden gate calling out to the skirmishers assaulting the garden and asking who is was they were looking for. Thunderstruck, they stopped and answered, *"Jesus of Nazareth!"*

Jesus answered, *"I am he,"* literally in the Greek *"I am!"* Carl Mende informed me that Leon Morris actually wonders out loud in his commentary whether this was one of the "I Am," statements for which John's gospel is so famous. At this moment, however, John notes two things. First that Judas is on the wrong side of this encounter. Judas was *"standing"* with the skirmishers, opposite a battle line of disciples on either side of Jesus. The other gospels offer more detail and drama. There was a Traitor's Kiss. Jesus personally rebuked Judas in front of everyone there. But John doesn't mention any of that. He is preoccupied with the fact that Judas in on the wrong side of the battle field. "What's wrong with this picture?" John seems to ask.

And, second, there is the strange fact that this well armed, well lit expedition hit the dirt when Jesus announced to them, *"I am he!"* Was it his reputation for power that made them cringe? Did some wind of the Spirit blow through the garden as the sound of Jesus words? Or was there some other reason? John doesn't say and we can only guess.

The cringing lasts long enough and is awkward enough that Jesus calls across the orchard a second time, *"Who do you seek?"* At which point the skirmishers begin to regain their feet and someone from the temple entourage calls out again, *"Jesus of*

*Nazareth!"* Jesus quickly identifies himself again, and pleads with the skirmishers headed for the gate not to mow down his men as they burst through the gate to bring Jesus into custody. Clearly, Jesus didn't want his fishermen and farmers and tax accountants attempting any sort of battle with Roman regulars. But as is often the case in battle, a number of Jesus' men hadn't understood their orders.

The Gospel of Luke records a conversation about swords at the Last Supper between Jesus and his disciples. All through the years Jesus had been with them, his men had always depended on God to protect them from whatever came their way, but now with Jesus going to the Cross all that was going change. The question was how. Jesus told them that, going out, they might have to carry swords, they might have to follow Jesus down a path that led to whatever cross the Father required them to bear.

But the men only heard Jesus talk about getting and carrying a *"sword"* and they eagerly told him they were already armed, ready for whatever might happen that night. He was teaching them about how to protect themselves in a violent, unpredictable world, but they heard him ordering them to protect him that night. So Malchus, the high priest's servant, joined the Roman skirmishers surging toward the gate, and Peter, spotting him as the leader, took Malchus down with slash of his sword. It was a wild amateur's stroke. Peter took off Malchus' ear and the apostle likely would have died in the next few seconds had not Jesus intervened instantly to heal Malchus and to stop the combatants before the confusion spun into full blown combat.

Jesus immediately clarified his orders: *"Put your sword in its sheath! Shall I not drink the cup that Father has given me?"* In other words, did you not hear anything I said about going away and reappearing and everything getting better because I will go to the Cross? Peter thought that he and the disciples would gain their place in the kingdom, standing at Jesus side, defending him against hopeless odds, believing that one more time Jesus would calm the storm and rule the chaos and save the day. Somehow, Peter thought, Jesus would get it done. His problem was that he didn't understand just how far the word "somehow" would stretch in Jesus hands.

Somehow for Jesus meant giving up the mastery that he rightfully possessed over absolutely everything, and placing himself at the mercy of corrupt tyrants like Annas and Caiaphas and Pilate. Somehow for Jesus meant consecrating himself, orchestrating circumstances so that he would become a sacrifice. Because only he could satisfy his Father's wrath against all the crazy stupidity human sin set into motion in another Garden long ago. Because one fact becomes absolutely clear in this wild melee that took place at Gethsemane and that is that Jesus was entirely in command over everything that happened.

The action stops and starts at Jesus' command. Nobody needed lanterns, torches and swords that night because Jesus knew his mission and was committed to the terrible course his Father set to buy us forgiveness for all the ways we've gone wrong. For Christ, all this swirl would lead to an uncomplicated act of love and he was absolutely clear about what that was. It was a good thing because everybody else was entirely confused. The fighting withdrawal Peter wanted was unnecessary. The search and seizure operation Malchus wanted to lead was entirely beside the point. Jesus was in command that night and still is now, and that is what makes it possible for you and I to start life over and wind up in heaven.