

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

Thursday, 18 April 2018, 7:00pm

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Tenebrae Meditation

Scripture: Luke 22:39-46



Everyone at some time during their life goes through a crisis, a time of utter darkness. While some go through darkness more than others, *we all do*. When, and where, was your pain? Or, is it now? Or, what will you do when it comes?



Jesus experienced great anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane. The angst was so deep that the author of Luke describes Jesus as 'sweating blood'. At the same time, the disciples experienced great anxiety, fear and foreboding. How did Jesus, how did the disciples,

how did we deal with our abyss; how did we cope with our descent into the well of darkness?

Some weeks ago in a sermon I preached on the Transfiguration, I interpreted the disciples' sleeping as symbolic of their 'denial' of Jesus' ominous warning to them that they "must deny themselves and take up a cross daily" (Luke 9:23).



I mentioned that their sleeping foreshadowed the time in the Garden when they would again nap during a pivotal time. I still believe this interpretation to be true. Let's think about it: Jesus asked his friends to watch and wait. Now, Jesus had no need for them to sound a warning to him, for he had not intentions of 'escaping'. Jesus also had not need for them to be armed and ready to protect him, for he had no intentions of making a defence. No, Jesus just wanted them to sit with him, to pray with him, to be with him, to stand by him in solidarity. Jesus had no intention of changing his circumstances, for he prayed "Thy will be done". Jesus wanted his disciples, in the darkness, in the emptiness, in the pain of the moment to simply be with him. Yet, Jesus found the disciples asleep, "exhausted from sorrow" (Luke 22:45).

For the disciples, sleep was a form of denial, a way to block out the anxiety, the pain. Sleeping was a way to dull their sense of being utterly alone. Some of us drink. It is a form of sleep. Some of us take pain killers, opioids. It is a form of sleep. Some of us zone-out and watch the television. It is a form of sleep. Some of us busy ourselves with chores and errands. It too is a form of sleep.

What did Jesus do when he felt alone and anguished? He prayed. He expressed himself, openly and transparently, with God. He poured-out his heart. He cried. Through prayer, Jesus sensed that he is not alone. Jesus advised his disciples to also pray. For what? That they not fall into temptation. And what would that temptation be? To deny the pain they are in, to avoid the cross, and to remain separated from God (from the time in the wilderness: comfort/bread, no pain or injury/ temple and power/kingdoms).



Friends, at this table, Christ is present. Whether our pain and anguish is in the past, whether it exists now, or whether it is still to

come, let us remember that we are not alone. For God is with us in Jesus Christ who also experienced gut-wrenching social, psychological, spiritual and physical pain. We are not alone for we have Christ with us and in us. *And we have one another.*



Just as God promised to never to leave us, and never has through the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, let us promise to never leave one another. Let us not sleep in denial, but let us sit with one another, cry with one another, pray with one another until our time of sorrow has past.

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded: “Amen”.