

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

April 14, 2022

Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service

“Agony of the Soul and Unshared Vigil”

The Rev Dr Scott Couper

This evening, our reflection focuses upon the readings that Sue Rowell and Holly Kennedy read for us entitled the “The Agony of the Soul” (Luke 22:39-44) and “Unshared Vigil” (Mark 14:32-44), respectively.

Two aspects of the reading have dwelled with me all week.

On that ache-filled night, Jesus prayed. Jesus was full of so much angst that the scriptures indicated that it was as if he was perspiring blood. This version of the story, where Jesus expressed so much worry, is not found in the gospel according to John (18:1-14) where Jesus was in full control of everything, almost orchestrating all that was to unfold. In Luke’s account, such assurance is not recalled. In Luke, Jesus was torn. On one hand Jesus pleaded that God relieve him of his deadly predicament. He said, “Take this cup away from me” (Luke 22:42). On the other hand, Jesus then surrendered and prayed, “Not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

How many times have we prayed for a circumstance to be removed? I know I have. Who has had a potentially debilitating injury or disease that we just wished to God could be magic wand-ed away? How is the rent going to be paid, now that

I lost my job? Who of you has been sick to your stomach with worry for a child? Or agonized about a broken marriage? How many of us have been tormented by a loved-one dying?

In Luke's gospel, in the Garden of Gethsemane, we are made aware that even one as perfect as Jesus suffered as we do. We are reminded that even one as innocent as Jesus experienced profound injustice. We are reminded that God knows full-well our suffering, our worry, and our pain. Because God loves us, God even experiences our suffering with us.

The second aspect of the scripture that touches me is that Jesus asked the disciples to stay awake, to be alert, to stand by him, to watch, and to pray. Yet, sadly, the disciples disappointed by falling asleep. The scriptures recount that the disciples were "exhausted by sorrow" (Luke 22:45). Hmmmm. I wonder. When I am full of sorrow, I can't sleep. I remember when my dear neighbor Eugene died. I walked from the Brooks House to Exit 1 three times, back and forth. And then, still, that night, I still could not sleep. No matter. Perhaps we all have become so exhausted from worry that we did eventually sleep.

When I reflect on Jesus' request of his disciples, I think he just desired friends near. That all. Nothing more. I think being with someone, being in solidarity, is everything. I remember once at the Thompson House volunteering to

just *be with* a woman dying, part of a team, twenty-four hours a day, all day, all night, keeping watch. Keeping vigil. So often, we feel we have to **do** something for someone. No. We need to just *be with* people. How wonderful it would be if we developed a ministry that only required you and chair! If anyone in our church is ill, or depressed, or worried, or in pain – what if we organized a handful of us just to sit, to stand vigil, just to be present – not to **do** anything – but to, with our presence, just say we deeply care. Wow! What a powerful message that would send.

Friends, may we recall in our moments of agony, that God is always with us. And may we as disciples, be there for one another, always present for one another, just as God is.

Amen.