

# THIN PLACES: GARDENS

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## Matthew 26:36-46

<sup>36</sup>Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” <sup>37</sup>He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. <sup>38</sup>Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” <sup>39</sup>And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” <sup>40</sup>Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? <sup>41</sup>Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” <sup>42</sup>Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” <sup>43</sup>Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. <sup>44</sup>So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. <sup>45</sup>Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup>Get up,

let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

## REFLECT & DISCUSS

### Scripture Context

In the scenes leading up to this one, Judas arranges to betray Jesus, Jesus enjoys a last meal with his friends, and Peter learns that soon he will deny Jesus. Of course, Peter refuses to believe this. The next scene, on the Mount of Olives, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays three times. Each time he finds Peter and the disciples asleep (foreshadowing the three denials of Peter soon to come).

Jesus taught his disciples to stay alert--stay awake--for God's kingdom is at hand. And, yet again, the disciples struggle to recognize it (ie, fall asleep). The early church and the faithful today are challenged to stay awake and alert to God's present action, especially when things seem especially ominous or perilous.

Gethsemane means “oil-press” and suggests a setting full of olive trees. Invoking the trees, press, and oil connects richly to the identity of Jesus as “the anointed one” (Messiah or Christ). And yet, here in the garden, critics of the early church also found ammunition to poke at the divinity of Christ: gods don't agonize this way, only humans do! Others questioned Jesus' courage and resolve, regardless of his divine status. To the church, this story can be seen as a profoundly beautiful depiction of Christ's full humanity.

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## Good News

*At the end of me is a God who is bigger than me.*

## Big Ideas

1. Prayer is not a negotiation, it is a transformation.
2. God does not want to take me to an altar, God wants me to be altered.

## Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. Recall a time in your life when, though you wanted to, you still had difficulty staying awake.
3. Sleep is also a metaphor for “alertness.” How is it that we fall asleep (or “check out”) in today’s world? What are the things that we should be paying attention to that we easily or eagerly fall asleep to?
4. Have you ever prayed in agony or grief to God to “take this cup” from you? What was your experience like?
5. Why might it be that “thy will be done” is the heart and great challenge of all prayer? What do you think is the meaning or purpose of prayer?
6. Gethsemane is a word meaning “oil-press” and is a symbol of Jesus’s agony and distress. What does it mean to you that Jesus fully experienced human agony, distress, and grief?
7. Have you ever had to make a hard decision that brought you great agony? What was that like? What did you do? In what way did God show up?

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