

Along the track

The Olive Grove

How many times have we been here before to this peaceful place? To sit quietly above the city of Jerusalem, to see the Temple, that ancient shrine, God's holy place.

Months before when we came here, Jesus wept: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! You will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

But tonight, we fell asleep. In fairness, it had been a tumultuous week – the entry into Jerusalem on the donkey with the crowds from everywhere hailing him, throwing branches in front of us – it was like the welcome for a superstar. 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' they called out! We were amazed – can it be that at last people could see who he was, what he could do, what his message meant? Or so we thought.

We wandered through the city that week but, after a couple of days we could feel that trouble was brewing. The mood of the crowd was changing, rumours that the Sanhedrin was out to get him. They were watching him, his every move. They had had enough of him and his challenges to their power. He didn't seem worried though, so neither did we. Then that strange meal tonight – it just wasn't the same. There was tension in the air, a sense of doom perhaps?

Tonight, he'll wander in the olive grove, and those who love him will now run from him.

He said to us "My heart is so heavy with grief, I feel as if I am dying. Stay here and keep watch with Me." But even then, we didn't. We went to sleep. We fell asleep when he needed us the most. He woke us a couple of times and pleaded: "Couldn't you watch with me even for one hour?" I tried for a while. I don't think I had ever seen him so intense. He went aside and I saw him fall facedown and I heard his prayer: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. I abandon myself into your hands; I am ready for all, I accept all." What did he mean? But tiredness took over and I went back to sleep. Finding us asleep added to his pain. I cannot begin to describe how I regret that now but worse was to come!

We awoke to the sight of torches, lanterns and Judas guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. Judas came and kissed Jesus, the signal to the guards but Jesus stepped forward and asked, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," but they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." Even then he protected us. Then Simon Peter, tried to stop all this but Jesus was arrested and bound like a common criminal and taken away.

We were stunned and afraid. So we ran, like cowards we ran away into the darkness. Peter didn't. He followed on, keeping his distance though. It was a terribly cold night so he joined others around a fire outside the place where Jesus was taken. And three times he denied he even knew Jesus. Three times!

Why were we so afraid? We had seen with our own eyes what he had done – how he had healed the sick, how he had cast out demons, how he had restored sight and even life to Jairus' daughter and to Lazarus. Why were we so afraid? Why did we leave him?

Am I am afraid of saying "yes", Lord. It's ok in the good times, but what about the times when I am challenged, when things don't go my way, when perhaps my heart is filled with grief too. Do I just go away because things don't go my way, how I have decided they should? Do I abandon friends, even family members because they ask too much of me and don't give enough in return? Do I walk away from my faith, my beliefs from you because it has all become too hard and not to my liking?

Do I pray 'let this pass by' or do I have the courage and faith enough in you to say 'yes'?

Regards
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