

Michael McGowan

Mark 14:32-42 – *A Prayer for When We're Stretched*

Preached at Trinity CRC – Cadet Sunday

February 2, 2020

Mark 14:32-42

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” <sup>33</sup> He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. <sup>34</sup> “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

<sup>35</sup> Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. <sup>36</sup> “*Abba*, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

<sup>37</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? <sup>38</sup> Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

<sup>39</sup> Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. <sup>40</sup> When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

<sup>41</sup> Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. <sup>42</sup> Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Have you ever heard of a toy called Stretch Armstrong?

It’s a rubbery guy about a foot wide...

It was still popular when I was a kid.

He’s known for being stretched...

You can stretch him somewhere 4-5 times his original length!

But, if you stretch him too far, you know what happens...

His skin tears and his jelly insides come oozing out...

Never to be stretched again.

One author says of our passage that:

“Jesus is being *stretched* to the limit.” (RT France)

Mark tells us that Jesus is deeply distressed and troubled...

He says to his disciples:

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”

Jesus is being stretched close to the breaking point...

The point where it's just too much to handle.

So, we ask “why?”

What's going on in Jesus' life that's stretching him to the limit? (PAUSE)

Jesus is distressed/overwhelmed because of what's coming ahead for him.

He knows that pretty soon he'll be crucified...

Which means he will have people hold him down while they drive big ol' nails through his wrists...

They'll put his feet one on top of the other and drive a big spike through his heel bones...

Once he's nailed and firmly fastened to this cross...

They'll lift it off of the ground.

His body will be positioned in such a way that he'll suffocate...

He won't be able to breathe.

So, he's looking ahead to a lot of physical pain...

He knows that he's going to die...

He has already told his disciples 3 times that he's going to be killed.

I think that's enough to stretch someone.

But for Jesus, it goes beyond that.

Just a few chapters earlier Jesus tells his disciples:

I came to give my life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

By his death, he is going to pay for everyone else's sins...

And that's a heavy burden to carry.

Imagine that you have a backpack on...

And in this backpack is everything that you've ever done wrong—

The times you've lied;

The times you've hit, bit, kicked, or teased your brother or sister;

The times you didn't listen to your parents or teachers;

The times you loved video games or hockey more than God—

Imagine that each one of these things is a rock in your backpack.

That backpack would be pretty heavy wouldn't it?

And everyone in the world has a backpack because everyone has done wrong.

Now imagine that Jesus says, "Let me have your rocks!"

So, we take a rock and we throw it in his direction.

But it's not just our rocks that are flying at Jesus...

It's the rocks from all of God's people.

Pretty soon Jesus is buried under the weight of the rocks of all of his people.

Our backpacks are empty now—

We're as light as a feather...

Free from all of those wrong things we've done—

We're free, but Jesus is crushed.

This is what it means that he gives his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus feels deeply troubled not just because of the physical pain he's going to experience...

But because of the weight of sin that he'll be under...

He is going to take the weight of all of our sin upon himself.

That's enough to cause someone some pretty serious distress!

How about you?

Are there times when you feel deeply troubled?

Hopefully it's not because you know you're going to die soon—

And I know that you won't be taking on the sins of the world—

But what are some things that make you feel stretched to the point of breaking?

Maybe you feel deeply distressed when you think about something you did to hurt someone.

How many of you have seen the movie "Wonder"?

It's about a boy, Auggie, who's born with a facial deformity...

His face is misshapen and doesn't look like everyone else's.

Auggie has been homeschooled by his mom all the way through elementary school...

It's been a way to protect him from being made fun of.

They decide that Auggie should go to school with other kids at the start of middle school.

So Auggie reluctantly heads off to his new school.

There is a boy at the school, Jack, who is nice to Auggie—

Who starts out as his friend...

Who actually likes Auggie and thinks he's funny—

But one day Jack is with a group of popular kids and they're making fun of Auggie...

And Auggie overhears Jack saying:

"If my face looked like that, I would want to die."

Of course this hurts Auggie...

But it has hurt Jack too.

Jack finds out that Auggie heard what he said...

And you can tell that Jack is crushed by it.

He realizes how much he hurt Auggie with his words...

And you can just see Jack stretching a little because of the guilt.

How about you?

Have you said something that has hurt someone?

Have you been mean to someone at school?

Have you teased your brother or sister...

Or talked bad about someone behind their back?

When we think about it, it causes some yucky feelings inside of us...

Maybe feelings of guilt—

Feeling bad for what we've done—

And this stretches us a little.

Maybe we feel troubled because of something we should do but we don't want to.

There's a story in the Bible of a guy who is very rich. (Mark 10:17-27)

He asks Jesus what he needs to do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus says, "Keep the commands of God."

The guy says, "Cool, I've done that!"

Jesus then says, "Go sell everything you have and give it to the poor..."

"Then come, follow me."

Do you know how the guy responds?

He went away *very sad*...

(it's the same word that describes how Jesus is feeling in the garden)

This guy was deeply troubled because he had a lot of possessions.

How about you?

Has God asked you to do something that you don't want to do?

Has he asked you to give up some of your possessions?

Has he asked you to give up some of your time to help someone out?

Give up some video game time or some time in sports?

This too can make us feel troubled or distressed...

And we start to feel stretched.

Maybe we're feeling troubled just because life is so hard:

There are tests at school and homework to worry about;

There are friends and people at school that can stretch us;

Sometimes our parents fight and it adds to the stretch;  
We're involved in so many activities that it's hard to catch our breath;  
And sometimes things happen in life that we just don't understand...

Like people or pets we love get sick and some die because of it.

When we slow down and think about it...

There are a lot of things in life that cause us to feel troubled or distressed...

Sometimes we can feel like we're being stretched to our limit...

About to break.

Where do you go in times like these?

Where does Jesus go when he's stretched to his limit...

When he's in this place of despair?

"Hi God, it's me."

Jesus cries out to God in prayer.

Jesus, who is 100% God—

Able to raise the dead;

Heal the sick;

Cast out demons;

The one who created the universe—

Jesus, who is 100% one of us—

Skin, muscles, and bones...

Eats, sleeps, poops, pees, and farts just like us...

When Jesus is stretched to the limit...

He cries out to God in prayer.

And if we look at Jesus' prayer...

We're given a way to respond when it feels like we're being stretched too far in life.

So, let's look at this prayer and see if we can apply it for our lives.

“Abba, Father” are the first words of Jesus’ prayer...

It’s Jesus’ way of saying “Hi God.”

These are words of intimacy and closeness.

If you were growing up in a family that spoke this same language (Aramaic)...

You could address your dad as “Abba”...

It means father.

It is still respectful of who your dad is...

But it is a term of affection and trust.

Jesus can call God “Father/Abba” because it’s true.

When we talk about the Trinity...

We say there is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the Son, so he rightfully calls God his Father...

He is allowed to address the creator of the universe saying, “Father.”

And you know what...so can we.

The symbol we’re using here is a conversation box with a heart in it:

When we pray to God, we’re starting a conversation with someone we love...

And, more importantly, someone who loves us.

We are actually encouraged to call God, “our Father.” (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6)

A father is someone who cares about us;

Someone that we trust;

Someone who wants to spend time with us;

Someone who can tell when we’re having a hard time in life...

When we’re feeling like we’re being stretched too far.

We start our prayer calling him Father because we belong to his family.

Because Jesus took away our sins...

We are God’s children...

And he loves us.

We are back in a relationship with God.

The next thing Jesus says in his prayer is, “everything is possible for you.”

It’s at the same time a statement of praise and a statement of trust.

As a statement of praise, Jesus is recognizing a characteristic of God.

“Nothing is impossible for you, Father.”

“Praise you God because nothing can stop your plans.”

“Praise you God because you are the most powerful Being in all of the universe.”

Jesus acknowledges the Father’s ultimate authority in the world.

At the same time Jesus’ words about the Father are a statement of trust.

“I’m in despair, but this is who you are.”

“You know exactly what’s going on in my life...”

“And you have the power to do something about it.”

“Nothing is impossible for you.”

When we pray to God, our Father, we’re praying to one who is all-powerful...

He holds the whole world in his hands.

Not only does he care deeply for us as a Father cares for his children...

God actually has the power and authority to do something about it.

When he saw that we were struggling in our sins he saved us...

God hears our prayers and answers them because he is a faithful Father...

And he is able to help us because he is Almighty God.

It’s only after recognizing God as Father and his ultimate authority...

That Jesus presents his request to God:

“Take this cup from me.”

In the Old Testament a cup was used to symbolize 2 things:

God’s judgment;

And suffering.

Jesus is about to experience both...

He is going to suffer on the cross for the sins of God’s people.

Jesus is in agony. (RT France)

Showing the human reality of his suffering, he prays to God:

“Take this away from me.”

“Don’t let me go through this.”

This is our posture before God too.

Especially when life is unbearable...

But in all other situations too.

We are able to pray to God about all of our needs.

I was talking to someone the other day—

Not from this church—

And he was telling me about the struggles he’s going through:

He and his wife are both struggling with addictions;

They have 2 young kids...

And he said: “It feels like I’m drowning.”

When we’re drowning, what do we need?

A life preserver...

Something to help us float.

“Take this cup from me” is asking God to help us out of our suffering:

“Help me as I walk through this struggling relationship”;

“Help me as I struggle with this tough season with my young kids”;

“Help me as I don’t feel a purpose in life.”

“I know that you love me as a caring Father...”

“I know that you hold all of the power in your hands...”

“Please help me now as I suffer.”

“Rescue me!”

“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

These are the final words of Jesus’ short prayer.

Jesus desperately wants to be relieved from his distress...

But even more than that, he wants God's will to be done.

He knows that his suffering and dying will save many people—

He trusts that God has a good purpose for his suffering—

So Jesus submits to the will of the Father...

He walks in obedience.

We have a "YIELD" sign to represent this.

If you come up to a roundabout there will most likely be a YIELD sign.

What do you do?

You give the right of way to whomever is driving on the roundabout.

We do the same thing with God.

We have our own will—

The way that we want things to work out in life—

But God has his will...

The way that he knows things will work out best for his purposes.

And God's will always takes priority in life.

And so, we yield to God's will...

We give him the right-of-way in our life...

Even when it hurts or doesn't make sense to us...

We walk God's plan.

The only way we do this though is knowing the first two parts of the prayer:

That God has a deep love for us as a Father...

That in the life and death of Jesus Christ God calls us his children;

That he wants to bring us to fullness of life in him.

And that God is all-powerful...

That nothing happens outside of his permission.

He is in control even when it doesn't seem like it.

This gives us the ability to yield to his will...

To surrender our plans for his plans.  
As you go out in this week—  
Whenever you feel stretched—  
May you pray this prayer knowing that God loves you...  
And that he calls you his child.  
And may it all be for his glory and our good.  
Amen.

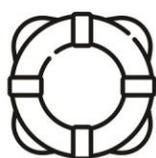
## ***Are you stretched?***

Prayer from Mark 14:36



Abba, Father,

everything is possible for you. 



Take this cup  
from me.

Yet not what I will,  
but what you will.

