

# “Sleepy Eyes”

Mark 14:32-42

I recently heard a story of one of the California wildfires from several years ago. There was a single woman who was evacuating from her home in a remote area. The only path in and out of her driveway was a small wooden bridge. As she started to approach the bridge, a flaming tree fell in front of her path. With panic striking her she put the car in reverse, looked behind only to watch as another flaming tree fell behind her car. She was trapped. She kept her car running, turned on the air conditioner and proceeded to fall asleep. My first thought, how could she fall asleep with fire raging around her? Then I realized when you have a traumatic experience there comes a point where the adrenaline wears off and your body has had enough and all you can do is sleep.

Hopefully you have never faced such trauma, but most of us have likely found ourselves in a situation where you are so tired that you can't fight fatigue anymore and you can barely keep your eyes open. It happens in the classroom at school, when you are completing a project at work, and believe it or not, even in the pews of a church. It's happened to all of us, so we all should be able to identify with Peter, James, and John as they succumbed to exhaustion in Gethsemane.

It had been a busy, exciting, scary, confusing, roller-coaster kind of week for the disciples. The Palm Sunday parade, walking back and forth to Bethany every day, driving out the money changers, and listening to the teaching of Jesus, while the critics stand nearby plotting. No wonder they had sleepy eyes. In addition to that, two days earlier Jesus had warned them to stay awake and watch for the Last Day (Mark 13:32–37). Maybe they had taken it quite literally and have been trying to stay awake all night.

On top of that, what could be more sleep inducing than watching another person pray? And even if they tried to pray themselves, how often have you ever nodded off during your own prayers? They reclined on the soft grass in the garden, the cool night air was perfect for sleeping—a nap was inevitable, right?

Indeed, it was. Not only was it unavoidable, it was sinful that they didn't do as Jesus told them, but let's be honest: neither would we have, if we had been in their shoes. In fact, in our lives today, we don't do much better. Like the disciples the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. We fail to do what Jesus tells us to and we close our sleepy eyes.

On the other hand, this scene identifies Jesus as the Lord of Israel who neither slumbers nor sleeps, whose eyes were set only on doing God's will. He had to be awake to persevere through the homestretch, to suffer the pangs of hell, and then to sleep the sleep of death in the tomb, for us and for our salvation.

Tonight's Passion Reading places before our eyes the depths of woe Jesus would suffer for us. If we can keep our sleepy eyes open, we see Him in the Garden of Gethsemane—sorrowful and troubled, even to the point of His sacred heart failing right then and there. The weight of the world's sins pressed down mightily upon Him; He fell upon His face in weakness and trembling, begging, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from Me." The cup Jesus spoke of was the cup of His Father's wrath against all the sin of the world.

Jesus did not want to drink that cup. Perfect, sinless, holy Jesus, prayed that He would not have to drink the cup of God's wrath. This teaches us that death and hell are not good or desirable for humans. Death, decay, and eternal suffering was not God's plan for humanity; those are consequences of Adam's fall, and it's what we all deserve. Except for Jesus. He was sinless. He didn't merit death; He didn't deserve to drink the cup of God's wrath. So His prayer certainly wasn't cowardly or faithless but was the language of faith in the God for whom all things are possible.

But Jesus didn't stop with, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." He continued, "Yet not what I will, but what You will." Again, He prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done." And a third time, He prayed the same prayer.

And then the Father answered His Son's prayer. While it was possible for the Father to remove the cup, the Father's will was for Jesus to suffer to spare *you*. The Father answered

Jesus' prayer by giving His Son the strength to accept His good and gracious will, and the Son willingly went into captivity when Judas showed up to betray Him. The Father willed to crush His own Son and make Him an offering for the guilt of our sin. Jesus finally closed His eyes, not in sleep, but in death. We must receive this news with awe and thanksgiving that the Lord has done this to save us from our sins; His good and gracious will was to love us by sacrificing His only-begotten Son.

But the eyes of Jesus would not remain closed, they were opened again in Easter life. He stood before His weary, tired disciples and said, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, their eyes looked upon His hands and His side. "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:19–20). Now, His nail-marked hands speak of God's goodwill toward you and all sinners: "Peace be with you."

Through all this, Jesus had eyes only for His Father's will and faithfully did that will. Now the good and gracious will of God is that you set your eyes on the Son, believe in Him, and have eternal life as a free gift. With that Good News in mind, you can fall asleep in peace each night, awake to serve Him each morning, and when your eyes eventually go to sleep in death, be confident that they will awaken to everlasting life in the resurrection. Amen.