

## Look me in the eye and say that

### Luke 22:39-62

Do you ever picture the conversation that you're going to have with someone? What you'd like to say to them, how to phrase it carefully, what points you'll make *sure* you're going to get across...

And then comes the moment that you're actually face to face with them, looking them in the eye... and it all goes quite differently to how you imagined it. If it's someone you've got a really secure relationship with, you find more natural words of real honesty coming out. If it's someone you're not so secure with, you hold back what you'd *really* like to say. Either way, as you look them in the eye you start to listen to what they have to say about it, too.

A lot of us struggle with prayer. We pray like we're picturing the conversation that we want to have with God, instead of just... *talking* to Him. *Listening* to Him. In Luke 22:39-46, Jesus prays. He prays like someone who looks God in the eye as He's doing it. He models how to do it, in the moment that He needed it most.

In v.42, Jesus does the two things that are at the heart of true prayer. *He honestly asks for what He wants; and He honestly asks for what God wants.* He lays out on the table exactly what His heart desires - 'Please, Father, take this cup from me.' The 'cup' in the Old Testament, which was Jesus' Bible, very often referred to the wrath of God. Jesus is beginning to really suffer now. He's becoming ever more conscious of what He's about to do.

In dying on a cross, He's not just being a loving example or a passive substitute. He's going to feel, taste, experience, the fullness of the fury God has towards the sin that we're all guilty of that warps this world. Jesus is going to drink it all, so that you and I don't have to taste a bit of it. What good news for us - but what a horror to face for Jesus.

What Jesus is saying in this prayer is, 'Please God, if there's another way, let it be that I don't have to go through with this. I honestly don't want to. Set me free of it, please?'

You see the quality of Jesus' relationship with God the Father in the total honesty of His prayer. How *honest* are you with God? Do you hide your heart behind some polite language? Or are you secure enough in your relationship with God as *Father* to pour out honestly?

At the same time, though, Jesus honestly asks for what God wants - and that *this* would take priority. It's the top and tail of His prayer. 'If you're willing... yet not my will, but yours be done, Father...' It's how He taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, which we said together earlier. Before asking for our daily bread, we ask 'your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.'

There's a wrestling of the heart that happens in true prayer. You lay out a raw heart and what you really, really want. And then you surrender, 'in the end, though, God, please do what *you* want. Whether that aligns with my desires or not. Align my heart with your will, Father.' Honestly ask for what you want, and honestly ask for what God wants.

We all *need* prayer like this. In v.43, we read about help from Heaven given to Jesus Himself as He prays it out. Through our wrestling prayers, God gives the strength to face the things He wills us to go through. If Jesus needed that, so do you and I.

It's easy to forget that, though, or just not believe it. Look at the disciples in v. 45. Jesus had already told them that they needed to do what He was off to do - pray. But they were knackered by a tough time, and allowed themselves to slide into sleep rather than pray.

There are times and situations in life where we get wiped out. Things causing us grief or mental anguish, times of stress and strain where we get tired from it. Those are the times where we can often let prayer disappear. We might be really conscious of it, too. 'I'll get back to it, I will, but for now I just need a rest from it. I need a rest from *everything*. That includes all the God stuff.'

But these are the times we *most* need to pray! Jesus said so twice here - in vv.40 and 46. It feels like sleep and rest is the best thing, or even the only thing we can do in the light of the situations we're going through. It may be that we need a good bit of that, but we need prayer more. If we're going to get the strengthening from God to *face* our situations rather than just keep numbing ourselves from them indefinitely, then we need to 'get up and pray.'

Read the start of v.44 - 'And being in anguish, Jesus prayed *more earnestly*.' He'd received God's strengthening. But He's still in pain. He doesn't pray with less gas, but *more*. Come on, hurting people, let's *pray*.

*God, I honestly want to ask for this... God, I honestly ask that you would do what you want though...*

Have you ever prayed until you were bleeding? Me neither. But Jesus did, v. 44 tells us. As the years since the New Testament were written have gone by, some of the manuscripts ditch this verse. Maybe it sounded a bit weird; a bit legendary myth.

But actually, modern medical research documents that under conditions of extreme stress and horror, sweating like blood can and does happen. It's a reminder of the extreme angst that Jesus was taking on. The sin of the world, remember. I wouldn't be surprised if He sweated like that over my sin, never mind everyone else's.

Through this stress and horror though, Jesus chose to pray. Maybe we won't pray until we bleed, but we could take prayer a whole lot more seriously than we do. For the aligning of our hearts with Heaven's agenda; for the strengthening we need for the road ahead.

If we really prayed we could stop limping and start living. If we really prayed we could stop falling down and start standing up as disciples. That was certainly what Jesus had in mind when He told His disciples - twice - to pray *so that they would not fall into temptation.*

The less I talk to God, the more I succumb to temptations of every sort. But the sort that's most in mind here is the temptation that sleeping Peter will soon fall to - the temptation to deny Jesus. To say, 'I'm not with Him'; to say, 'I'm not doing it His way.'

It's a growing temptation in parts of this world, certainly in this nation, and even now in this community. And Jesus says we need to pray, that we might stand. In between the two times Jesus says it in vv.40 and 46, He's doing it Himself - praying, that He might not deny God and His will.

This week, a few early mornings I've had a strong sense of God telling me, 'Get up and pray!' (That was before I'd set eyes on this passage, for those who like to think that auto-suggestion is always more credible than the Holy Spirit). So I've been like, 'Really, God? What I honestly want is to stay in bed... okay, but what you honestly want is for me to get up, fine...'

Now this stuff doesn't happen to me. It happens to Kerry quite regularly actually, she's become quite used to it. Me, not so much. But there I was, early in the mornings last week, at first just for 5 minutes, then 10, then 30 - praying. And God said, 'You know who to pray for...' He gave me reasons to pray for Heather and her healing. But He also told me to pray for the young

people of our church. And as the days went by, He gave me more reasons and more focus on that.

So I share with you what I think God led me to pray for, and perhaps wants us all to pray for - that our young people will not fall in their faith. The teens and twenties. That those who have walked away will come back. That those who are still with us will stand firm in Christ. We all need that prayer - but I'm just sharing with you a particular lead I think God has given us here.

This week is prayer week in the church. The week where we encourage you to get into your prayer triplets or groups, and pray. Those of you who have faithfully been doing that month by month, keep going. Those of you who have stuttered or stopped, let's go again. Those of you who have never got into this, let me encourage you to. Let's meet as 2s, 3s or 4s and pray.

This week, let's honestly pray to our Father for what we want, without failing to honestly pray for what He wants. And let's pray - for our young people in particular - that our faith will not fail, but that we will stand by Jesus firmly in the years ahead.

*Pray - that we (and our young people) will stand by Jesus*

I'd bet that every one of us can think of some times in our lives where we've been caught out, and we've been so embarrassed we couldn't think of anything to say.

Maybe you've nodded off at work or at school, and the boss or the teacher comes round and wakes you up. Or you've been making fun of someone, doing an impression of them, and you turn round to find they're right there in the room too. Or you've said something disloyal about your friend - only to see them walk past just as you say it.

In those moments, you hope against hope that the person you feel ashamed in front of doesn't say anything... 'Please God, let it just be an awkward silence. Don't let them say anything...'

And then... they say something. 'Care to tell me why you're asleep?' 'That's what you think I'm like?' Or worse - they don't say anything. They just... look at you. Eye to eye. No words, just the unspoken hurt.

All of this and more happens in Luke 22:39-62. Three times in this passage, there's a moment between Jesus and other people where they hope He won't

say anything; but He does, He asks them a question - a question they're too ashamed to answer.

In v.46 to dozing disciples, 'Why are you sleeping?' No answer. In v.48 as Judas leans in to greet him the way close friends did, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' No answer.

And to the authorities suddenly feeling in a position of power and intimidation over Jesus in vv.52-53. 'Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me.' He'd called them out for being too scared to make this arrest in public view. No answer.

These are all moments where Jesus effectively says, 'Look me in the eye and say that...' 'Look me in the eye and do that...' Moments of weakness, moments of disobedience, moments of betrayal, moments of stubbornness. Moments where Jesus asks questions, and people have got no reply.

The disciples just got exhausted. They were with Jesus, they wanted to follow and obey - but when they heard Him tell them the next thing they should do, they fell asleep instead. I assume you know the feeling as well as I do - 'I know God says to do this, but I can't manage another change just now - He'll understand that I'm just tired and strung out.'

What would your response be if you found Jesus looking you in the eye, asking you what you're doing, and then repeating the same instruction about what's next for you? Let's make that less hypothetical - what *is* your response to Jesus doing that now? Remember, He's still alive, still Lord, and still leading us disciples when we're awake to being led.

As for Judas, well... he was covering over his rejection of Jesus as King with politeness. What a total charade. Everyone in that garden knew by that point that Judas was handing Jesus over to His death. And Judas must have known that everyone knew it. He still thought it worth going through the motions of a polite greeting as if they were still friends.

Is that like you? You and Jesus, and probably everyone else around you, know fine well that you don't call Him King. But without thinking too much about it you reckon that if you act politely around God and His Church, things will be civil and well. I wonder what your moment of looking Jesus in the eye will be like... when Jesus says to you: 'Really?'

The authorities that come to arrest Jesus - well, they're just incredibly stubborn. They come with swords and clubs, blood pumping, mind made up. Then an ear gets sliced off, and in the sight of the whole arresting party, Jesus *heals* the man. Restores the ear. This is a *miracle*. How on earth could they arrest Jesus after seeing *that*?

It's simple really. Miracles don't persuade people to change sides to Jesus; not when they've already got their minds made up, and everyone around them says 'let's get rid of this guy.' It takes a fearful stubbornness and an understandable cowardice for these people to press on with getting rid of Jesus.

Lots of people are still the same way. They've experienced enough of Jesus to know, 'Actually, He might really be who He says He is.' Enough to make them feel a bit uneasy that they have been suppressing that thought and doing anything about it. But their stubbornness and fear about changing their minds and changing their lives wins out. If that's you, can you look Jesus in the eye and do that?

Now, nobody wants to come to church to get a good telling off (well... maybe here in the Highlands, there are people who do want just that...) But, in this passage Luke really does want us to feel the things we need to be ashamed of. N.T. Wright says, 'As Luke leads our eyes to the foot of the cross he means us to feel not just sorrow and pity, but shame.'

This isn't about a good old dose of religious guilt to carry around. This is about remembering that Jesus isn't just an idea that we talk about, but a real person that we give the cold shoulder to in various ways. And like any relationship where there's been some distance, looking Jesus in the eye and having an honest conversation does some good.

*If Jesus was looking you in the eye right now, what might He ask you?*

Then there's that one time in the passage where Jesus doesn't need to say anything. It's all in the eyes. And Peter's got no words in response to the silent look from Jesus in v.61. What might have been going through Peter's mind as that cock crowed and as Jesus 'turned and looked straight at Peter,' perhaps as He was being moved from one place to another?

'How long has Jesus been standing there? When did they bring Him out? Did He hear me that last time? Maybe all *three* times?!? Wait... this is what He said would happen! Even the thing about the cock crowing! Oh, Jesus,

I'm sorry. What must He think of me now? Oh, God, I'm sorry!! Oh, I can't believe I was so *weak!!!* This isn't me! This isn't who I want to be!

Lots of Christians love this story, because we can relate to it so much. We don't kick Peter when he's down; we say, 'Yeah... I've been there.' Denying friendship with Jesus. Denying church and fellow Christians; saying 'I'm not one of them.' Acting like we don't know what people are talking about when they discuss where Jesus and His Christians are coming from.

Whether it's a single weak moment in conversation with others, or whether it's years of denial about the Jesus we really do know, those times of denial can feel very wounding, when we let them. The thing is, we find ways not to *let* them wound us.

We can put it down to tiredness. Like Peter in the courtyard, we can mean to follow Jesus but get weary and unguarded in the middle of the night. We can put it down to peer pressure. Like that fireside gathering, in the groups of people we rub shoulders with it can be very difficult to say, 'Yeah, I know Jesus.' And it's just warmer and more comfortable at the fire than being kicked out in the cold.

But if you look at the end of the story, Peter doesn't put his actions down to anything. He doesn't cover them over with excuses or extenuating circumstances. Luke says in v.62, Peter heads outside and weeps. *Bitterly*. It sounds like an awfully sad ending to a dark story. But actually, here is the beginning of hope for Peter. And for us.

This is Peter just being sad and genuinely sorry that he denied Jesus. Weeping bitterly is the beginning of his restoration to friendship with the Lord. Poor Peter - Jesus will go to His death, and this will have been the last thing that happened between them. But, to Peter's great surprise, Jesus will soon be resurrected to life, and He'll tell Peter that their friendship and his faith will be resurrected too.

Weeping bitterly about denying Jesus is a far healthier reaction than brushing it off, excusing it, or letting your heart get harder and colder until you find that you really *aren't* with Jesus anymore. So much of this place we live is filled with people who grew up knowing this Jesus, and knowing this story, but for years have lived in a comfortable denial of the Lord - no tears shed.

If we're going to relate to Peter in his story of denying Jesus, let's go further. Let's relate to him in his reaction of weeping over it, wishing we'd never done

it, and seeking to put things right with the Lord we really do want to follow through life and death and into eternity.

Peter would look Jesus in the eye again. And some day, so will you and I. So let's put aside prayerlessness, tiredness, stubbornness, busyness, false smiles in church and cold hardened hearts. Let's find prayers and tears again. And let's do that with confidence, because just as Peter would find a new, joyfully restored friendship with Jesus, so will we. Because Jesus is good, and He loves us.

Remember that whilst Peter was denying Jesus to look after himself, Jesus was standing firm in front of His accusers to see through dying for Peter. Jesus saw through His commitment to die for you. So be assured, He wants to look you in the eye. And you may see challenge in that look, but what you will mostly see is a love that will not take its eye off you.