



Garden Reflections

THOUGHTS FROM GETHSEMANE



Come away with me for a while, he said. And we did, our thoughts swirling with all we had seen. A triumphal entry into Jerusalem ~ surely this is it, the time when Jesus will reveal himself as the Messiah! Surely, he will put right all that is wrong under Roman rule! Surely this is the moment for which we have all longed.

But other images flood our minds as well. Confusing images. Jesus upending tables in the Temple, Jesus washing our feet. Jesus talking about dying! I am confused. I do not know Jesus at all, it seems. I love him, and I follow him, but in my heart, I realize I do not know him at all.

So I am glad he asks us to come away for a while, to a quiet garden where I hope he will explain everything yet again. Because I am lost and confused, and nothing is making sense to me.

What questions do you have about Jesus?

The garden is beautiful. This is the place, the perfect place and the perfect time for Jesus to explain everything.

Except he doesn't. He calls Peter, James and John, and bids them to come away with him. And the rest of us are left alone. Again. I am alone with my questions, and bits and pieces of what he has said swirl around in my mind like a mist – I remember something, but it is illusive, and I can't grasp it.

I know that Jesus is the Messiah. At least I think I know, but I wonder now exactly what the "Messiah" is. I pause, and I ponder my questions. Is it even right for me to HAVE questions?



What questions do you have about Jesus?

Spend a few moments asking yourself what questions you have about Jesus.

Do you struggle with a combination of belief and unbelief?

Do you wonder where he is in this moment, and if he even sees your present circumstances?

Do you question your ability to love and trust him when things seem to be spiraling out of control?



Is Jesus actually who you expect him to be?

The more I think about what has been happening, the more life seems like an out of control puzzle, where I can't see the whole picture and I fear that some of the pieces may be missing

On the one hand, Jesus has said quite clearly that he is the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel. On the other, he speaks of his body breaking and his blood spilling out for us.

Surely he wasn't saying he is going to die. I am afraid. I wish he was here with us now, and not down the path out of our presence.



Is Jesus actually who you expect him to be?

Take a few minutes to consider your expectations of Jesus.

Where did those expectations come from?

Do you think that they might be at least somewhat inaccurate?

How does the possibility that Jesus may not be what you thought feel to you?



Deconstruction

I sit with my questions but they are too large for me. My mind cannot fathom everything I have seen, all I have heard. I don't understand.

And I escape for a while, in a fitful sleep. I cannot get comfortable, so I toss and turn, and even in my sleep, I am aware of the rocks and gravel that are my bed for this night.

I miss the comfort of my bed. I miss the comfort of knowing who I am, and what lies before me. I miss knowing anything at all. I am deconstructed, and I don't know where the pieces go to make it right.



Deconstruction

Spend a few moments now considering what life is like right now, when all eyes are focused on Covid-19; when every cough or sneeze, things that used to be commonplace, now put thoughts of doom into your mind. Maybe you wonder where your next paycheck is coming from. Or someone close to you is now sick and fighting for breath.

Do you feel like this is a time of deconstruction for you? Where there is nothing solid that you can count on?

Allow those thoughts to surface, and acknowledge them.



Deconstruction

Times of deconstruction can be terrifying. We like to count on a solid foundation, and we like to know what our future holds.

But we never really do, do we?

Deconstruction is no doubt uncomfortable and scary. But in truth, we don't really know what our next day will bring, ever.

But as painful as it is, deconstruction can also be an invitation to enlarge the way we think, to broaden and correct our perspective.



Deconstruction

Sit for a moment with your hands palm up in your lap. Make a tight fist with each of your hands.

Imagine all of the things that you hold so tightly in your fists – job security, health, the confidence that our favorite grocery store will have whatever you need, the ability to connect with friends and loved ones face to face, whenever you want.

Now, slowly, open your fists until your hands lay flat and open. What does it feel like to begin to release your hold on those things?

Are you even able to do so?



Let this cup pass from me

Farther along the path, Jesus himself wrestled with his own thoughts. He knew exactly what was to come, but there was one thing he didn't know – exactly what would it be like for him to be separated from the Father? Because, for the first time in eternity, that was what was about to happen.

And there would be pain. Excruciating pain, not only the pain of the Cross, but the pain of parting from those he had come to love so dearly; and the pain of seeing his mother's anguish as she beheld her first born son dying horribly on the Cross before her very eyes.

And his prayer was, "Father, if it be your will, let this cup pass...." If there is another way, Father, don't ask me to do this.



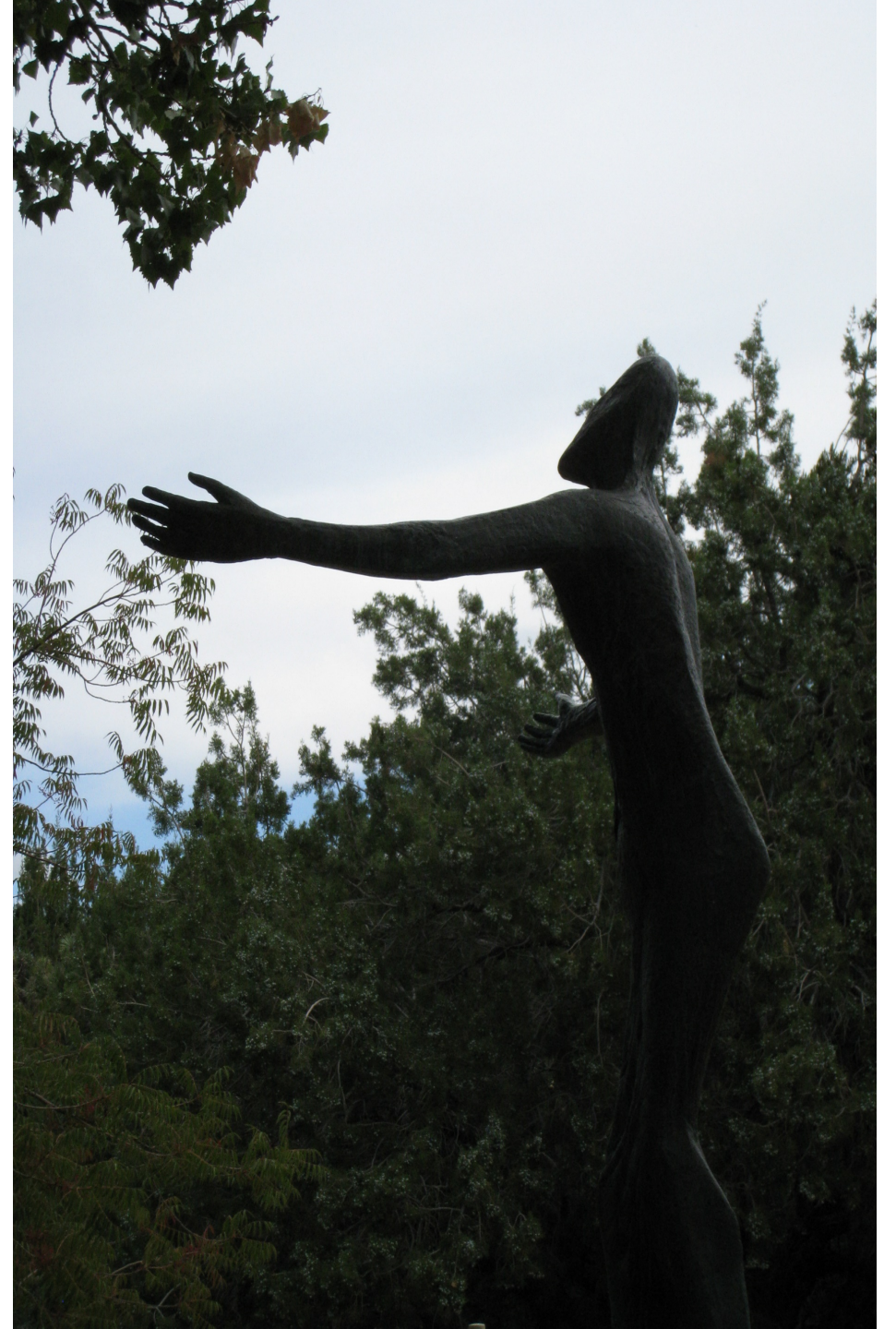
Let this cup pass from me

Can you pray that prayer? Can you name your fears, your disappointments, your desires, and ask God to find another way?

Or do you feel like you can't be that honest with God?

Take a moment and imagine yourself as the son (or daughter) in the story of the Prodigal Son (or Daughter). Remember that the Father never stopped hoping, never stopped watching for the return of his precious child. There was no condemnation, no "I told you so's," no shame or piling on of guilt. There was only love.

With that in mind, pour out your heart to God, and ask him for what you need.



Surrender

Jesus asked three times for the cup to pass. His prayer was so intense that the Bible says he sweated drops of blood.

But in the end, Jesus prayed the ultimate prayer of surrender: "Yet not my will but Yours be done."

Father, I have poured out my heart to you, have laid my soul bare before you. And my prayer hasn't changed. But I understand that your ways are greater than any other, and I surrender my own desires to you. I trust you, and I will follow the path you have set for me.





Surrender

Surrender is one of the hardest things we can ever do. Putting aside our own hopes and dreams for a “greater glory” that we cannot see? That’s hard.

Sometimes it helps to think about how God has come through for you in the past, or how some circumstance that seemed devastating at the time turned out for good.

Or, sometimes you just have to stop and breathe.

Breathe

For the next few moments, I want you to do just that. Breathe in, breathe out.

As you inhale, follow the path of your breath – feel it go through your nostrils, down your windpipe, into your lungs. Feel them expand, and imagine how the blood picks up the oxygen, bringing nourishment to every organ, every cell.

And as you exhale, follow the path of your breath as it leaves your body.

Do this several times.



Breathe

Now, as you inhale, imagine you are breathing in trust. Whether we feel it or not, God is faithful, our ever-present hope in times of trouble.

God loves you with an everlasting love. He longs to gather you close to him, and whisper words of love to you.

Breathe in these truths, and when you exhale, exhale your fear, your doubt, your anxious thoughts.

Do this several times.



Hope

Read the words to this Psalm 27:13-14:

I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.

Can you believe, truly believe, that the way things are now
are not the way they will be?

Can you ask God for strength for today
and hope for tomorrow?



Come to Me

Lyrics by Daphne Rademaker

Come to me, my children, come
There's no need to be afraid of your Father
When I see you I will run. I will be there, I will be there
Before you call, I will answer you.
While you still speak, I will hear.
My ears are tuned to the cries of my chosen ones!
In my arms you can rest in me,
For you are my very own!
So hold on to the hope you have,
I will call you to myself, and I will never leave you alone.
I will not forget you, I'll carry my lambs in my arms.
So I will comfort you, and carry you close to my heart.



Thank you

Thank you for spending time in the Garden with me, and taking time to wrestle with the hard questions. Easter is a time of joy, but also a time of tears. Part of being family is being “together” during the hard times, in whatever form that takes. Right now, it seems that virtual togetherness is the way it has to be. I am grateful that technology allows us to meet in creative and unusual ways.

We at Ventura Vineyard want you to know that you are not alone. If you need to talk to someone, contact us through info@venturavineyard.org. Be sure to let us know how to get ahold of you. One of our leadership team members will get in touch with you and talk, listen, pray, whatever you need.

If you have more tangible needs, please let us know. We do have some limited resources available to help out if you need it.

Most of all, know that we are all in this together. While that may sound trite and overused, it is true. One of the many lessons learned these days is how very important our Ventura Vineyard community is, and how much we love each and every one of you.

God bless you and keep you safe and well,

Gini Downing

Elder and Member of the Leadership Team of Ventura Vineyard

