

# The Whole World's Gethsemane

The International Sunday School Lesson for March 11th is "JESUS IN GETHSEMANE"—Luke 22.

By WILLIAM T. ELLIS

Into the life of every individual, however shallow or mature, comes an experience which we call "Gethsemane." Ella Wheeler Wilcox beautifully gathered this thought into a poem:

When souls are glad and hearts are light,  
And not a shadow lurks in sight,  
We do not know it, but there lies  
Somewhere, veiled under waning skies,  
A garden all must some time see—  
Somewhere lies our Gethsemane.

"With joyous steps we go our ways,  
Love lends a halo to our days,  
Light sorrows fall like clouds afar;  
We laugh, and say how strong we are.

We hurry on, and hurrying, go  
Close to the borderland of woe,  
That waits for you and waits for me—  
Forever waits Gethsemane.

"Down shadowy lanes, across strange streams,  
Bridged over by our broken dreams,  
Behind the misty caps of years,  
Close to the great salt fount of tears,  
The garden lies; strive as you may,  
You can not miss it in your way.  
All paths that have been, or shall be,  
Pass somewhere through Gethsemane.

"All those who journey, soon or late  
Must pass within that garden's gate,  
Must kneel alone in darkness there,  
And battle with some fierce despair.  
God pity those who can not say,  
'Not mine, but Thine,' who only pray,  
'Let this cup pass,' and cannot see  
The purpose of Gethsemane."

**The Old Garden Itself**  
Perhaps a word about the actual spot where the agony of Jesus transpired, will make more definite our thinking. The Garden of Gethsemane is one of the sacred sites concerning which there can be no doubt. The present Garden of Gethsemane, surrounded by a stone wall, and containing several venerable olive trees—one of them surely more than a thousand years old—is in the care of the Franciscan monks. There can be no doubt that if it is not the actual scene of the su-

preme Tragedy, it is within a few yards of it. The spot is one of the most affecting upon earth, and the reverent traveler goes again and again into that peaceful, tenderly kept garden, to let the dust of the world be swept from his spirit by the breezes of memory which blow through the old olive trees.

Gray, as if they had won through pain to peace, gnarled and twisted as if through suffering to strength, stand these old olive trees which have witnessed so much of history. Beneath these ancient trees the flowers bloom in the garden, in sweet symbolism of the beauty and joy that have sprung up in human life under the shadow of the suffering, sympathetic Saviour.

The old monk who lovingly tends the garden—how trivial the differences between churches seem when one comes to Gethsemane—with whom I had congenial conversation, though each of us could speak but little of the other's language, gave bits of the tree from broken limbs, and these I have had made into crosses for friends. Often memory goes back to that beautiful Garden of Renunciation and of Communion. To visit it is to know a chastening, sanctifying, uplifting experience.

**Under the Tree of Olivet**  
All fine spirits love the out-of-doors. In hours of stress and crisis they instinctively turn to the woods and the fields of the open skies. A true nature lover was Jesus; and he was accustomed to resort to these gray groves of olive trees on the west slope of Olivet, for prayer and meditation and communion with the Father. Even Judas knew this spot to be one of his haunts.

So, in his great hour, Jesus took His three closest friends and wended His way down to the sheep-gate at the northeastern corner of the city, even as the traveler may do today; and crossed the brook Kedron at about the spot where the lepers sat for years; and penetrated into the seclusion of the grove, off from the main highway.

Leaving behind even His closest friends, the Master went into the recesses of the woods alone. There is no room for a companion in the ultimate experiences of life. One by one we face the great varieties. Even our dearest must stay without the gate of Gethsemane when we are summoned to enter there alone, beneath the trees, Jesus underwent the real crisis of His passion.

**When Self-Assurance Failed**  
Most of us distrust the blatant person's loud word of self-confidence and assurance of power. When Jesus intimated that His disciples would fall Him that night, Peter impetuously protested that he would stand fast, though all men fell away. The very boastfulness of the utterance prepares us for the subsequent events. The trouble with Peter was that he was too self-reliant; too sure of Peter, and not dependent enough on God. No Christian may count on himself to keep faithful; but only on God to keep faith with him.

The words of constancy were scarcely said on the lips of the three most loyal disciples before they were overcome with sleep. They could not watch while Jesus prayed. Their love was not masterful enough to drive sleep from their eyes, in even their Leader's darkest hour. Gethsemane will not have delivered its full message to us, unless it humbles our spiritual pride.

**The Song of the Svent**  
Two dramatic extremes are in this story. It begins with a song, "When they had sung a hymn they went out into the Mount of Olives." Can we conceive of it? Jesus leaving His last meal on the old terms with His disciples; bearing in His heart the heavy consciousness that one of His comrades was even at that moment on an errand of treason; knowing that He was going forth to agony beyond words; to desertion by His dearest; to betrayal and denial and to death itself—with a song on His lips! Mark this, all ye shallow optimists; here is the world's highest mountain peak of courage, the singing Saviour on the way to the Gethsemane and Calvary.

The other extreme of the story is the sweat of blood, a physical phenomenon not unknown to medical science, but marking the very ultimate of human intensity of suffering. The blood from the punctures of the thorn crown, and from the spear thrusts of Calvary were not so significant as this crimson which the agony of soul forced from the pores of the Saviour's face. We must look upon this to know what salvation costs.

**Why the Agony?**  
What was the "cup" that Jesus prayed might pass from him? Was it the arrest, the shame, the buffeting, the crucifixion? So we commonly say; but others have pointed out that this could hardly be the case, since it was for this very purpose that Jesus had come into the world; to miss this would be to fail in His mission. Surely, our Lord was not such a one as would purchase immunity from pain at the cost of honor and duty.

Was it not rather, as has often been suggested, that the agony of Jesus was

caused by the fear that He might not physically be able for His task, and that He might die before His work was done? The human frame had almost reached its limit. Nothing would please the adversary better than the untimely death of Jesus. There seems a reasonableness in this idea, that the agony was from fear that Christ might not physically be able to fulfill His mission.

**What Makes Gethsemane?**  
That point is only incidental. The great reality is that Jesus suffered as never man suffered, but in the end triumphantly declared, "Thy will be done." Whatever the cause of the wrenchings of the soul of the Redeemer, they eventuated in a complete and utter submission to the Father's will. That is what makes a Gethsemane. A soul struggle which seeks first of all docility to God and peace with His purposes, is the only experience that is worthy of this great name. Any misfortune, however bitter, is not a Gethsemane unless it has this spiritual purpose and result.

The Garden of Gethsemane is the garden of renunciation of self and of content with God. The finest of all poems touching this experience of Christ is that one born of Sidney Lanier's dark hour, when he knew himself doomed by disease, with his life's dreams unfulfilled:

"Into the woods my Master went,  
Clean forsopt, forsopt  
Into the woods my Master came,  
Forsopt with love and shame.  
But the olives they were not blind to Him,  
The little gray leaves were kind to Him;  
The thorn-tree had a mind to Him  
When into the woods He came.

"Out of the woods my Master went,  
And He was well content;  
Out of the woods my Master came,  
Content with death and shame.  
When He came and Shame would woo Him last,  
From under the trees they drew Him last;

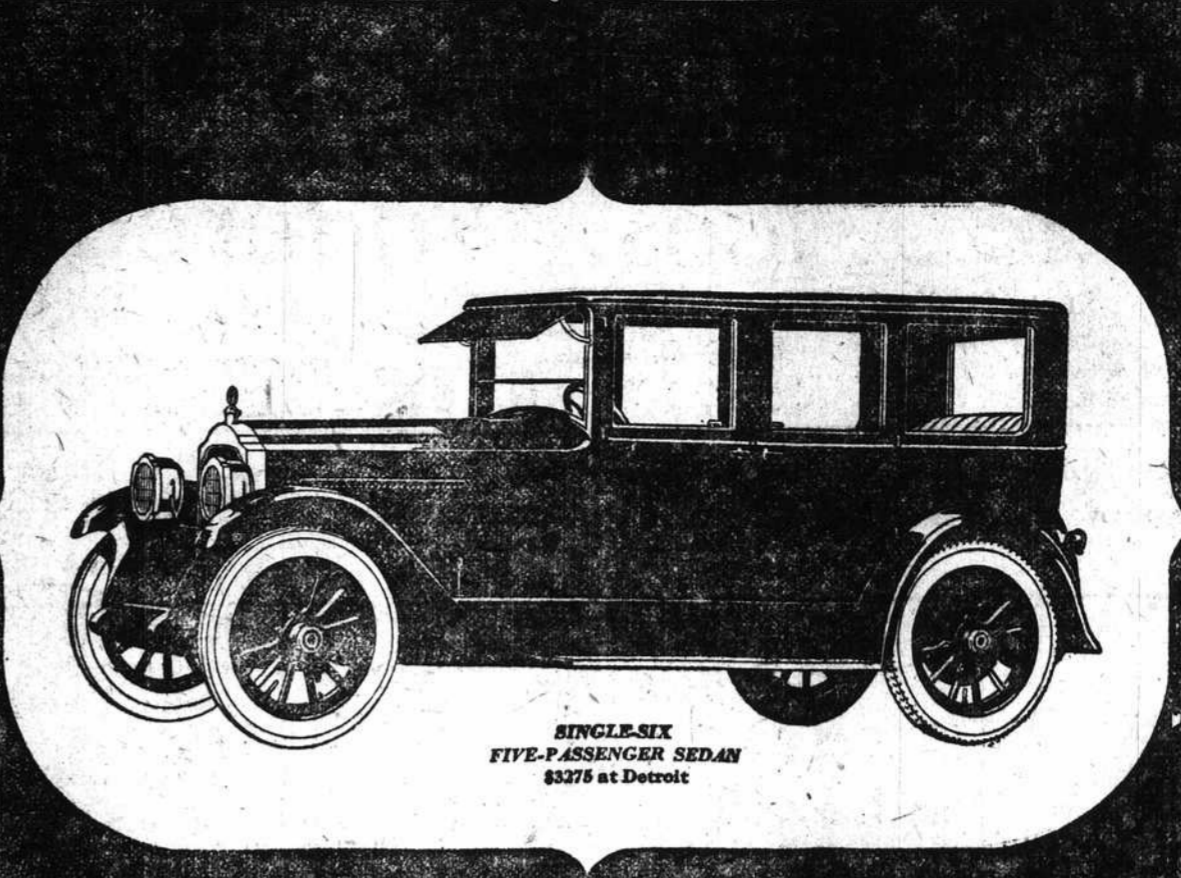
"Twas on a tree they slew Him—last  
When out of the woods He came."  
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—Francis E. Willard.

How oft the sight of means to do ill  
makes ill deeds done. —Shakespeare.

No word He hath spoken  
Was ever yet broken. —Anon.

"For success I ask no more than this  
—to bear unflinching witness to the truth."  
—James Russell Lowell.

I had fainted unless I had believed!



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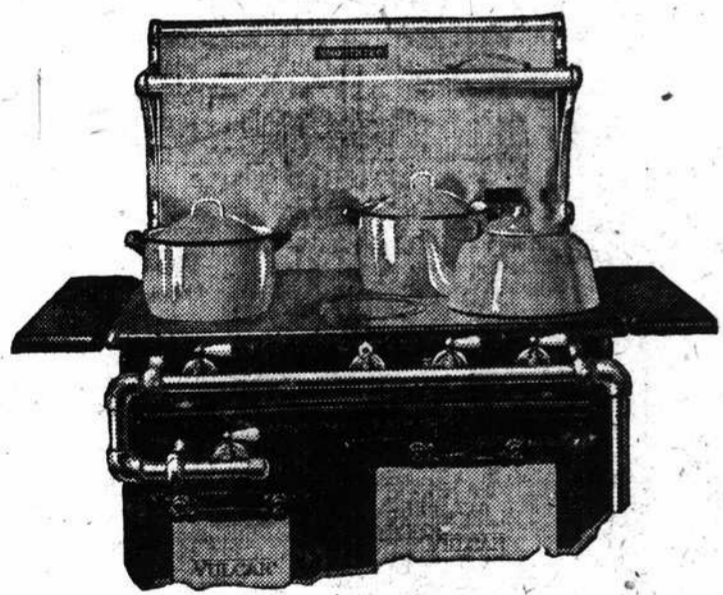
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to see the goodness of Jehovah in the land of the living.

—27th Psalm 13.

It is too late! .. nothing is too late  
Till the sad heart shall cease to palpitate.

—Longfellow.

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—Roosevelt.

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