Devotional Reflection, Monday, July 20, 2026
Proper 11, the week of the eighth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Sleeping in the Garden

Key phrases for reflection from today's reading:
40Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' 42Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' 43Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. 45Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners

You will find the full text of today's Gospel at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP*, 977)
AM, Psalms 41, 52 PM, Psalm 44
Joshua 7:1-13; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 26:36-46

Today we celebrate the Feast of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Amelia Bloomer, and Sojourner Truth . (See below.)

David's Reflections

Poet Frederick Faber once opined:
O love of God! O sin of man!
In this dread act your strength is tried,
And victory remains with love!*

Today's Gospel opens a window into the dark moment in which Christ's strength and commitment were tried, his prayer in the Garden. His resilient

commitment shows us that victory remains with love. (See Hebrews 5, a vivid passage about Jesus praying with strong crying and tears, which may allude to the Garden scene.)

Jesus sensed what the morrow held for him. He had seen repeatedly the angry faces of his enemies and felt the sting of their criticisms. He could anticipate the venom they would spew. He knew the harshness of the Roman overlords of Palestine and could envision their contempt for all things Jewish being hurled at him once arrested. He probably had seen people crucified, hanging with their lungs squeezed of breath and with thirst and exposure draining them of life. So much here for him to dread.

From his teaching, it appears he had come to understand that his innocent suffering would provide forgiveness and healing for all. He was steeped in the teaching of Isaiah (Isaiah 53 may have first set forth this idea of the innocent one suffering for all.) He sensed he was the prophet greater than Moses (Deut. 18:15-19).

His words at table earlier that same night had hinted at all that. "This is my body." "This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28). How dark it would be to sense the weight of rejection and shame about to be thrust on his shoulders. How foreboding for us to know what he may not have, that he would feel abandonment by God and the crushing weight of the world's evil that would dwarf the weight of the cross beam he would carry. Even from the distance of time, even though we've not experienced such a dreaded prospect, our hearts can be moved by his angst.

He had asked his closest friends, Peter, James, and John, to join him at this place of prayer. Jesus needed their companionship, their encouragement, their sharing in his prayers. It was late, in more ways than one. Time was almost up. Surely his closest friends would understand. Surely they would watch with him and pray with and for him. Surely they would embrace him and share in his fearful dread. Surely they would help him maintain his resolve to go wherever God's intentions called him. At least that is what he expected.

His strength already was being tried, his resolve challenged. And, now, those treasured close friends' insensitive slumber added to his burden and his isolation.

"Could you not stay awake with me one hour?", Jesus' asked. His voice must have been filled with pain, his heart, with a sense of profound aloneness—his closest friends sleeping in his moment of deep agony.

Our strength can be tried, too, stretched often to the breaking point. This Gospel has opened a new window for me into the meaning of all prayer. Could we not see it as being present with Christ? He continues to pray for us and for the world he seeks to deliver and transform. He continues to experience with us the agony and angst of our existence. He has been perched on the trembling edge of unwillingness and disobedience and knows only too well all the inner and outer forces of darkness that seek to force us over that edge.

Remember that line in Prayer A in *The Book of Common Prayer?* "Holy and gracious Father, in your infinite love, you made us for yourself." (BCP, 361). In this sentence I hear that God created us to enjoy our presence. Remember the Genesis story about God walking with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day? I grieve the large portions of my life where I spent little time just being present to God in prayer, remaining awake in the garden as it were.

Our neglect of silence, contemplation, meditation, and prayer, on this understanding, would be the equivalent of Peter's, James', and Johns' dozing adjacent to Jesus' agonizing. Our awakening and spending regular and intentional times at prayer would be our way of being present with Christ and sharing in his loving, agonizing prayers. It would be our way of responding to God's intent to enjoy relating to us.

Can we not watch with him one hour? I do not want to sleep in the garden ever again. I do not want God to be pained by my absence. Victory remains with that kind of love, being present to the divine Triunity in prayer.

*Cited by William Manson, *The Way of the Cross,* (Richmond: John Knox, 1958), p. 80.

Collect of the Day, Proper 11, eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we

cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 231)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Amelia Bloomer, and Sojourner Truth, Social Reformers.
http://satucket.com/lectionary/Womens_Rights.htm

Collect of the Feast of the Feast of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Amelia Bloomer, and Sojourner Truth
O God, whose Spirit guides us into all truth and makes us free: Strengthen and sustain us as you did your servants Elizabeth, Amelia, and Sojourner. Give us vision and courage to stand against oppression and injustice and all that works against the glorious liberty to which you call all your children; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*

Collect for the Renewal of Life
O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness while it was day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 99)

A Prayer for Seeing Others as Community
Gracious God, thank you for the diversity of human beings that surround me on every side. In the ideas, in the hopes, in the dreams, and in the struggles of those who share this earthly life, let me find that through a community of human beings I am made fuller and more alive. Let the fullness given by community give me the courage to offer my own unique self with humility to the lives of others. As we all share in the life that you have so graciously given us, may we be the lights of your love to one another. *Amen.*
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http://www.explorefaith.org/prayer/essays/communitypray.html

In the Evening
O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is

done. Then in thy mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. ***Amen***. (BCP, 833)

A Collect for Mission
O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 100, 257)

Daily Office Gospel, Matthew 26:36-46
36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' 37He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. 38Then he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.' 39And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' 40Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' 42Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' 43Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. 45Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer
Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*