

Any teacher will tell you that the most effective way of teaching is to ask questions. When the students are younger, the questions which are asked of them may serve mainly to have them repeat the facts of what they have just been told. But as the student matures, the purpose of the questions is to get them to think, putting together many pieces of information which they already know to come up with something new. When properly used, questions can cause us to do a lot of thinking, maybe even a lot of soul searching. At times, questions may even make us feel a little uncomfortable because we do not like the answers which we have to give. But even those questions serve a good purpose. Other questions may make us search long and hard for the proper answer. Again, such questions serve a good purpose to make us stop and think about things which we may have passed over lightly before. Because the use of questions is such a good tool for teaching and learning, the theme for our Lenten devotions this year is: Searching Questions From Our Savior's Passion. Most of these questions will be asked by Jesus Himself. Yet, a few of them will be asked by Jesus' enemies. This evening, let us begin with the question which Jesus asked of three of His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. **COULD YOU NOT KEEP WATCH WITH ME ONE HOUR?** He reminded them that 1) The spirit is willing, but 2) The flesh is weak.

Maybe it would be well for us to set the scene. Jesus had celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples, and during it, He had instituted the Lord's Supper. After the meal had concluded, they all went out of the city, to the garden of Gethsemane, or an olive grove. On the way, Jesus had predicted Peter's denial, and all of the disciples had protested that they would stand by Jesus no matter what would happen. After arriving there, Jesus left most of the disciples, and took with Him only the three which were the closest to Him — Peter, James and John. They went apart by themselves. Jesus began to be very sorrowful, and shared this feeling with these three. Jesus knew what going to happen to Him in the next hours — the sufferings and agonies which He would have to endure for the sins of the world — and that weighed heavily upon Him. He was going to Gethsemane to pray, to ask His heavenly Father if it were possible to do this another way so that He would not have to undergo all of this suffering. He needed to be strengthened for the task which lay ahead.

Jesus brought these three disciples apart from the rest and had told them about how sorrowful He was. He was looking for support from them, for He asked them also to watch and pray. It was not a difficult request of them, but was one which they should have easily been able to do. Having made this request, Jesus went off by Himself to pray.

The Lord makes a somewhat similar request of each one of us, doesn't He? Can you keep watch with Him for one hour? Like the disciples on the way to Gethsemane, we profess that we are willing to endure anything for Him — even death. After all, we know everything which He did for us. We have witnessed His love which compelled Him to lay down His life so that we might live forever with Him. And He asks for so little in return. He does not demand that we make tremendous sacrifices of time and treasure to prove that we are worthy of Him. He offers us all of His blessings as a free gift. His love for us far exceeds anything which we might even be able to imagine.

Like the disciples, our spirit is very willing to do anything for the Lord to serve Him in love. He has given us guidelines to follow in our lives here on earth. These guidelines are not meant to take away rights and privileges, but are solely intended to serve our own good. He desires that we immerse ourselves in His Word, being constantly reminded of how He fulfills all of His promises. Through that Word, He strengthens our faith in Him and in all of His promises. He asks us to come to Him in prayer for help in dealing with all the various situations that may arise in our life. We are able to do these things by ourselves at home, or at home with our families. We can do these things together with other believers as we gather as a congregation in Bible Studies and worship services. Even now, during Lent, we have the special opportunity each week to be reminded of His great love in sacrificing Himself for us. We can just hear Him asking, Can you keep watch with me one hour? That is not too much to ask, is it, for just a little of your time? And in return He promises many great blessings.

Like the disciples, our spirit is very willing to serve Him with our whole lives. But as Jesus reminded His disciples, that even though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. Jesus went off by Himself, and threw Himself totally into His prayer, asking for another way of saving mankind so that He would not have to bear the agonies before Him, but not as He wanted, but as God wanted. He prayed so hard that His sweat was as great drops of blood falling to the ground.

When He got done praying, He came to the three disciples whom He had asked to watch and pray with Him, and found them sleeping. It was at that time that Jesus asked them, **“Could you not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** Jesus went to pray two more times after this, and each time that He returned, He found them sleeping. They did not see the dangers which were about to confront them, so they were not on guard, but had allowed sleep to overtake them. To them it did not seem important enough to keep on watching and praying.

But Jesus knew what was going to happen to them yet that night. They would all flee for their lives. Peter would deny that he even knew who Jesus was. Then, after He died on the cross, they would all despair because they felt that Jesus was not the Messiah whom God had sent to them. These were all serious challenges to their faith which they were going to have to face. And they were not seeking strength beforehand to handle these trials.

The spirit of the disciples said all of the right words. And, no doubt, they truly meant exactly what they had said. But Jesus knew that men are made up of more than just spirit, they also have their old, sinful flesh with them. And that sinful nature is weak. It is constantly fighting against the proper desires of the spirit, so that we end up being unprepared to face the challenges that may come our way.

So the first question being put to us this Lenten season is Jesus’ question to His disciples: “Could you not keep watch with me one hour?” Like the disciples, I think each one of us will have to hang our head in shame because we have not kept watch as Jesus wants us to. We have not always spent time with Him and His Word to nourish and strengthen our faith as He wants us to. But the question was not asked just to make us ashamed of ourselves. The point of the question was to have us see that we do need help because we do have the weakness of the sinful nature within us. Then, having come to understand that, we flee for refuge and help from the only One who is able to keep us safe through every trial and temptation that may come our way. May this question cause to remember that we need all of the strength that we can to be able to keep that sinful nature in check. So let us pray to our loving Savior that He would help us to keep watch with Him by making use of every opportunity we may have to strengthen our faith through His Word.