Sunday, September 27, 2026　Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

Mark 14:32-42: "Jesus' Vulnerability"

◎ Praying, "Abba, Father"

Today's Scripture passage is known as the "Prayer in Gethsemane." It depicts the moment shortly before Jesus was crucified, when, facing his own death, he offered a prayer to God. A few pages later, we encounter the scene where He is "crucified." The image of Jesus portrayed here is by no means that of a "perfect and strong Son of God." What we see is a pitiful human being overcome by fear, uttering words of weakness in verse 34—"My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death"—and trembling as He falls to the ground. And He prayed as follows: "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup from me." "This cup" refers to the suffering He was about to endure—that is, His death on the cross. And then there is the word "Abba." Here, Jesus addressed God as "Abba, Father." "Abba" is a word in Aramaic, Jesus' native language, that means "father." It is also the term a small child uses to affectionately call their father—in Japanese, it would be something like "Papa" or "Daddy." It is precisely the kind of word a child uses when calling a parent, a blend of dependence and trust.

In our home, when our two-year-old feels anxious, he comes running to me with a desperate look on his face, crying out, "Mama!" Or he calls my husband "Toto!" and goes to him asking to be picked up. This prayer that Jesus offered truly radiates the image of a child crying out, "I'm scared! Please help me!" Without worrying about appearances or trying to look cool, just like a child clinging to a parent, he cries out, "I don't want to die. I'm scared. If possible, please take this suffering away from me." It is precisely in this "uncoolness" and "weakness" that I sense the testimony that Jesus became a "human being" who shares the same pain as we do.

◎To Understand Human Suffering

Why did Jesus Christ have to become so weak? Why did He have to be so deeply wounded? What if Jesus had been a powerful figure who could easily overcome any suffering? That would be reassuring, wouldn't it? You could trust Him, right? I think He'd be admirable. But in that case, He couldn't save us from true loneliness and sorrow. That's because it is precisely because Jesus experienced true suffering that He sits beside us when we're in pain and says, "I know how you feel." Without having been wounded Himself and having experienced being worn down both in body and spirit, He couldn't truly share the burden of others.

For example, there's a story from when my son was little. When he was a baby, if he saw a bruise on my leg, he'd come over and touch it with a look that said, "What's this?" Since he didn't really understand what pain was, he'd touch it out of curiosity. Just after he turned two, I had bought a bicycle that April, and I fell off it and got another bruise on my leg. My son, who had grown a bit, saw the bruise and said, "No." He had come to understand that it was something that hurt. I think he said "No" because it wasn't a

pleasant sight to look at—it looked painful. How did he come to understand that it hurt? It's because he, too, had started walking a lot, fallen many times, and accumulated experiences of feeling pain. He had come to understand the meaning of "pain." And recently—he'll be two and a half soon—when I say, "Mommy has a headache today, so please be gentle with me," he's started patting my head. It's because I've been patting his head every time he gets hurt, so he remembers that and is imitating me. He's become able to imagine not just his own pain, but also that someone else is in pain. And eventually, he'll be able to empathize with others' pain. The pain of others is something that only those who have experienced the same pain can truly understand.

On a more personal note, early this year, I suddenly received a message from a junior I knew from college who was working as a pastor at a church. "I'm at my limit," he said. When I asked what was wrong, he told me, "I woke up this morning and my body just wouldn't move." I listened to him, saying, "I understand, I really do." Because I'd gone through the same experience myself, I could vividly imagine his situation—it hit too close to home. As I've mentioned before, I developed depression at the church where I was assigned right after graduating from college. That was seven years ago. Since it was a large church, I was swamped with work. On top of that, because I lived on the church grounds, I had no private life—there was no space for my mind to rest—and I eventually suffered a mental breakdown. I've since taken time off to recover and am feeling well again; in fact, just last month, my doctor told me I'm in remission. Over the past seven years, I've wondered why I had to suffer so much from depression. And just recently, I came up with my own answer—I think this might be it. My answer is that it was so I could be there for a friend who was struggling with mental illness, just as I had. I think that friend contacted me first because she knew I was a pastor and that I had experienced depression myself. Depression was a terrible illness for me, but I began to wonder if it might have been a trial God gave me so that I could be there for this friend—to listen to her story and share in her pain, even just a little. Because I've experienced that pain myself, I understand the other person's pain all too well—to the point of feeling it myself. I believe this is what it means to be there for someone.

To put it another way, you could call it "compassion." The word for "compassion" in the New Testament comes from a term that can also be translated as "to feel a pain in one's very gut." A famous example is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It is written that when the Samaritan saw the man who had been attacked by robbers—stripped of his clothes, beaten, and left lying naked by the roadside—he "had compassion on him." The Samaritan felt the man's pain as if his own internal organs were aching. We, too, use this word "compassion." We offer prayers such as, "Lord, have mercy on us." This is a prayer asking God to draw near to our pain and to share in it with us.

Jesus experienced the ultimate pain. Through that painful and agonizing experience, He became able to imagine our pain. He became able to draw near to us. The Lord endured His suffering so that He could share in our pain and suffer alongside us, saying, "It hurts, doesn't it? It's agonizing, isn't it?"

©Jesus' Pain and Loneliness

Jesus' pain was not limited to physical suffering. He was also overcome by emotional anguish. The Bible describes how the disciples had fallen asleep while Jesus was praying. Even as Jesus prayed with all his might, they could not overcome their drowsiness. From Jesus' perspective, the disciples failed to understand just how much he was suffering. No one was there to stand by him. Jesus was experiencing that kind of loneliness. Why did Jesus bring his disciples with him? I think it's likely that he wanted them to watch over him as he prayed. And he wanted them to join him in prayer. He wanted them to say "Amen" with him, to affirm that this prayer would be answered. Jesus felt vulnerable. It is written that "he was so sleepy." Because they were sleepy, they fell asleep. I feel that the disciples' behavior in this scene mirrors my own faith. I cherish Jesus, but I cannot remain fully devoted at all times. I end up consumed by my own concerns. I forget about God and prioritize only myself. When I think about it this way, I realize that it is I myself who drove Jesus into loneliness and caused him suffering.

A Swiss theologian named Karl Barth spoke these words in one of his sermons: "Some people, like the philosopher Socrates, drank poison without fear and died. There have been wise men who met a more noble death than Jesus Christ. Some might say that, compared to such people, Christ was somewhat weak and overly timid. No, that is not the case at all. As for anxiety, the anxiety the Lord Jesus felt at that moment was far worse than we might infer from His words. It was beyond words. No other human being could have endured it, nor could anyone even imagine it. No human being has ever been so utterly crushed, nor has anyone ever trembled or feared to such an extent. When we feel anxiety, or when we think about the anxiety of others, the Lord Jesus' anxiety was greater than that, and that same anxiety continued infinitely. The reason for this was what lay before His eyes. It was the sea of lies and injustice that all humanity possesses; while we see only a tiny fraction of it, the Lord was seeing the whole of it at that moment. And in that, He sensed God's wrath and eternal destruction. Bearing the sins of all humanity, standing before God as a great sinner, and shouldering the punishment that humanity deserves—because this was what lay before the Lord Jesus, that is why He trembled."

The passion and suffering of Jesus Christ do not refer solely to His death on the cross. It had already begun when He prayed in Gethsemane. The path to the cross, along which Jesus endured such suffering, was originally the path that we humans, as sinners, were meant to walk. However, the Lord Jesus took upon Himself all that suffering and walked that path as our substitute.

Later, He was betrayed by Judas, one of His disciples, and arrested. While Judas alone is famous as the betrayer, he was not the only one who betrayed Him. Afterward, Peter also denied knowing Jesus. All the other disciples fled as well. I cannot help but wonder how profound His loneliness must have been—that not a single one of the disciples with whom He had spent so much time, the very people in whom He had placed His trust,

remained by His side or stood with Him. Then, accused of blasphemy, He was insulted, beaten, and spat upon. What lay ahead was death on the cross.

©Death on the Cross

In the end, Jesus prayed, "May Your will be done," and went to the cross. Death on the cross is the ultimate loneliness. It is precisely that loneliness that gives us hope. No matter how miserable we feel, or how abandoned by everyone we may feel, it leads us to the hope that "Jesus is already there, waiting for us." It is in the figure of Jesus Christ as He began His journey of suffering—wounded, forsaken, and made utterly weak—that we find our salvation. When He gave His life on the cross, He bore all of our weaknesses and all of our pitiful failings, even those that make us want to fall asleep, and died carrying them all.

No one prayed with Him. It is precisely because Jesus experienced such loneliness that He listens to our prayers.

I want to keep in mind just how weak our Lord Jesus Christ was. It is because of that weakness that we have been given the grace of salvation. No matter how painful the times may be, Jesus shares in that suffering with us. He suffers alongside us. He stands by us in that pain. That is the grace given to us through Jesus' weakness. I want to be someone who walks through life keeping in mind this one truth: that Jesus was wounded just for me.