

“Judas”

Sermon for Sunday, June 11, 2017

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Holy Scriptures: John 13: 21-30

Thank you, Chancel Choir, for offering to the glory of God Pepper Choplin’s “Judas.”

They offered the piece on Maundy Thursday.

We needed once again to hear, to receive, to be moved by such spirituality.

After today our Choir will take a well-deserved break until August.

We are so grateful for their worship leadership.

Let the Church say, “Amen!”

As you could tell from the recognition we just had for this week’s Summer Day Camp/VBS,

we had a terrific experience.

We began each morning with group singing

followed by a skit by our seminarians Anna Strickland and Amanda Tatlock.

Each skit was about a girl

who wanted to be a superhero and was learning what it takes.

Frazzled superhero Anna was pouting when Amanda comforted her.

Amanda:

How are you feeling today Anna?

(frazzled superhero) Anna:

Not so good. We've learned that heroes have heart and courage.

I have a problem.

I don't have any wisdom.

Everyone said when I got older I'd have wisdom,

and I'm getting older and I don't see wisdom around anywhere.

Suddenly five-year-old Zahriah spoke up.

Zahriah:

You can't *see* wisdom.

Everyone knows it's *invisible* and *comes from God*,

because *God is real*, not a fairy tale.

Amanda and Anna did not even finish the skit,

because Zahriah understood immediately

and taught the whole camp that Wisdom comes from God,

who is real, not a fairy tale.

Our children have much to teach us about spirituality.

As do our parents.

A couple years ago I preached on Judas during a city-wide Holy Week service.

That same week I told my mother that I was planning to speak about Judas.

I also informed Buffy Calvert that the theme for the Holy Week services was

“People on the Way to the Cross.”

She said, *“Well, he didn’t get very far!”*

Listen for the Word of God:

John 13: 21-30

²¹After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²²The disciples looked at one another uncertain of whom he was speaking.

²³One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; ²⁴Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.”

So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.”

²⁸Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival”; or, that he should give something to the poor.

³⁰So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

*This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.***

For as far back as I can remember

I've associated Christian faith with social responsibility.

Maybe it was because my home congregation practiced a social gospel,

believing and singing, preaching and practicing a Christian faith

that is grounded in the context of serving people in need.

Maybe it was from hearing the stories of Jesus,

stories of a suffering servant constantly, lovingly, graciously reaching out

to the lost, the last, and the least,

inviting folks into His life and inviting Himself into ours.

Maybe it was because of one Sunday

without dry, uncooked macaroni and Elmer's Glue.

When my brothers and I went to have church

we would jingle the coins in our pockets for the offering in Sunday School,

and when we left church we would invariably carry home

our arts and crafts project that we had made in Sunday School.

And, I swear, it was always some creative use of dry, uncooked macaroni

stuck with Elmer's Glue on a white paper plate,

art supposedly in the shape of Jesus or Moses, church steeples or sheep.

Every now and then we would expand beyond expectations

and get to make a dry, macaroni *sculpture!*...that rested on a white paper plate.

Or, if we were really, truly blessed,

we strung the dry, uncooked macaroni on a thread and made a necklace.

Then we got to proudly wear our faith around our neck.

So you can imagine my delight the day this nine-year-old

was told by a Sunday School teacher

that arts and crafts would not consist of mac and glue.

Instead everyone would get to make a personal banner,

which we would carry and show to the neighborhood

when we paraded next Sunday to the Easter Dawn Service.

My classmates each got a piece of 12" by 12" square felt cloth,

and started to cut out egg shapes and cross shapes to decorate their banners.

One classmate started to make cut outs of animals going two-by-two into an ark,

and quickly got pulled aside by the teacher

for some additional instruction on the nuance of Jesus' resurrection.

I looked at the blank piece of felt and pictured an image burned into my heart

from a passage of Scripture that had been read in church,

a passage that stuck with me and floated there in my mind,

being teased and played with,

quietly meditated upon as I went about living.

(Don't let anyone tell you that children cannot contemplate theology.)

Scissors sliced through felt and there quickly emerged

an image of two right hands approaching from opposite sides of the banner,

each holding a piece of bread,

each preparing to dip into a common bowl.

When nine letters forming four words were added above,

the banner was ready for show and tell on the Day of Resurrection.

The next Sunday we paraded from our church

to the site of the ecumenical outdoor Easter Dawn Service.

We stood in a circle around the empty tomb

and then a lady stood in the middle of our circle and said,

"He is not here! He is risen!"

We sang "Christ the Lord is Risen Today!"

and I held up my little banner that asked, ***"Is it I, Lord?"***

"Is it I, Lord?"

That question has legs.

"Is it I, Lord?" has stood the test of time.

Our Scriptures for today offer a conversation that is in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

In Mark and Matthew the disciples speak directly to Jesus,

asking, wondering, pleading to know whether they are the ones to betray Him.

In both Luke and John we overhear the Gospel,

observing as the troubled disciples interact and converse together.

John 13 reads: *After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared,*

“Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

The disciples looked at one another uncertain of whom he was speaking.

“Is it I, Lord?” still shakes us to our core.

Consider that every time we have Holy Communion

we repeat Jesus’ words at the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11: 23-24):

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you,

that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,

and when he had given thanks,

he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.”

When we gather at the Lord’s Table and re-live the Last Supper,

the Holy Eucharist is offered to one and all with love and forgiving grace,

and we make sure to mention the betrayal.

We recall that on the night He was betrayed,

Jesus dipped His hands into the common bowl with a follower and friend

who also dipped into and shared the common bowl,

one who partook the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.

We remember the betrayal...and the betrayer.

We remember the one who sold information to the authorities

so that they might arrest Jesus somewhere quiet,

somewhere away from the crowds who might defend him.

The authorities needed someone to identify their leader,

which tells us how common and normal our suffering servant leader looked.

(Possibly not as hot and hunky as he is portrayed on a TV melodrama.)

We remember the one who betrayed Jesus,

and we will not let it go

nor do we let him back into the fold.

History is written by saints and winners;

Judas is cast as the loser and sinner.

We tend to forget and overlook an inconvenient truth,

that when Jesus said in the Upper Room, "*One of you here will betray me,*"

everyone present said, "*Is it I, Lord?*"

We all have it in us to do incredible acts of mercy and love,

and we have the capacity to do evil, to betray Christ and one another.

"Is it I, Lord?"

If you go to the Upper Room in Nashville,

you may sit in a lovely chapel

and admire a wooden carving of De Vinci's Last Supper.

The day my family went our tour guide pointed out the twelve posts on the altar rail;

eleven posts were named for the disciples and one was for St. Paul.

What?

Eleven disciples?

We thought there were twelve...

There is no altar rail for Judas.

Judas has been cast out of the Upper Room;

betrayers and sinners need not apply.

When I saw that, heard that, and let it sink in,

I felt as if I, too, was cast off and cast away and cast aside.

They say the Church is the only army that shoots its wounded.

More and more often our congregation is welcoming home folks

who are walking wounded,

folks who feel as betrayed by the church as by anyone else.

"Is it I, Lord?"

Are you like me, feeling far too often like the disciples at the Last Supper,

being uncertain of whom Jesus was speaking...

because he could have been speaking about me...about you...about us...

We can all relate,

for when it comes to asking Jesus whom to judge and pin the blame,

whom we can point a finger at,

we discover that four of our own fingers point right back at us.

We can all relate,

for we have known what it's like to betray someone else's trust,

and to feel betrayed by someone we trusted.

We can all relate,

for we know the pain of being undercut and undone and burned

by those we love and put our trust in,

and we also know the pain of admitting, disclosing, and confessing

before God and one another that we have broken vows,

leaked confidences, let friends down, forgotten promises,

abandoned what was entrusted to us,

dismissed what was once a sacred trust.

You can only be betrayed by those whom you trust;

you can only betray others who have put their trust in you.

We know this pain.

We have a sense of what Jesus must have felt;

we also know what Judas must have felt;

we also know what all the disciples must have felt

when they asked, "Is it I, Lord?"

Columbia Theological Seminary is right down the way,

that outstanding divinity school where future Sunday School teachers

learn how to make arts and crafts projects

out of dry, uncooked macaroni and Elmer's Glue.

At Columbia Seminary there is a student dormitory that overlooks the school commons.

In one of the windows is a sign that reads,

"SEMINARY STUDENTS PLEASE DO NOT WALK ON WATER"

Please don't walk on water.

Please don't point fingers at sinners or cast away betrayers.

Please don't be so hard on yourself; be good to you and to one another.

Please do let Jesus forgive you and through you to forgive one another.

Please do remember that when Jesus returned from life-after-life

the very first thing he did was to forgive Peter and those who had betrayed Him.

Please do make room and make space and make a home

for the lost, the last and the least,

for the abandoned and the abandoners,

the victims and the victimizers.

You and I know all too well what betrayal feels like, sounds like, smells like, hurts like,

And, yes, deep down inside we already know the answer to our question,

“Is it I, Lord?”

Yes, it's-a-me, Lord, it's-a-me standing in the need of prayer.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!