

Sunday Sermon
March 28, 2018
John 13:21-32
For Sinners and Saints
Singing Together “Ah, Holy Jesus”

Like many of you, I have found inspiration and meaning in the first two services of this week and in the meditations of Tom Bland and Marshall Jolly. I am humbled to be up here today.

We are on a journey to the cross, and the gospel lesson for each day becomes more and more dark and dismal as we move toward Good Friday. Such that when I read the gospel lesson for today, where Jesus foretells his betrayal, I thought, “Why did I not volunteer for Monday?”

In 35 years of preaching, I have never seriously addressed this text. Truthfully, I did not think Judas had that much to do with me.

But here we are on “Spy Wednesday.” Spy Wednesday is an old, uncommon nickname for the Wednesday of Holy Week, called that because it is the day we remember how Judas conspired with the religious authorities to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Because the action of Judas was seen as covert or clandestine, it conjured up the image of a spy, and the name Judas became synonymous with betrayal or treason.

On this day, children of old in villages in Europe would take an effigy of Judas, throw it from their church steeple and then drag it through their village hurling stones at it and beating it with sticks.

But as I said, I never gave that much attention to Judas. Today we are going to experience this narrative together. Parts of the text will be read, there will be some reflection as we go through them, then we will sing a verse of the Lenten hymn, “Ah Holy Jesus.” So please take a hymnal, open it to hymn #289 and lay it on the pew beside you for when the times come to sing.

This is not an easy or fun hymn to sing, but then this is not an easy or fun week. This is an old English paraphrase in old English language of a German meditation on the passion of Christ. I encourage you, even if you feel you cannot sing it well, to use its words as a prayer.

Our lesson comes from John chapter 13. It is the last supper of Jesus with his disciples, a Passover meal. During the meal, Jesus gets up and washes the feet of the disciples, all the disciples, including Judas. He talks about why he has done that, to show the disciples humility and servanthood. And then Jesus foretells his betrayal:

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

Jesus is troubled. He is concerned for the disciples, and he knows he will be betrayed. He knows who. He knows when. So does Judas.(1)

We are like the children of old. We like to villainize Judas and beat up on him. But really we have a love and hate relationship with him. We hate him for what he did to Jesus. Yet we love that he takes the rap, and we can put the blame on him,(2) rather than focus on the ways we betray him, personally as individuals and in the world as his church.

verse 1

**1. Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended,
that we to judge thee have in hate pretended?
By foes derided, by thine own rejected,
O most afflicted!**

²³ One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him;

²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?”

There is an obvious question to Jesus’ statement “one of you will betray me,” but no one wants to ask it. So Peter, good ole impulsive Peter, gets the disciple sitting closest to Jesus, the “disciple Jesus loved,” John says, to ask, “Lord, who is it?”

If Peter really wanted to know, why did he not ask himself? He was never shy of asking questions at other times. Was he afraid of the answer? Suspecting that it could be him? Or realizing it could be any of them?(3)

Truth is Judas is not so much the culprit as he is the mirror of us and our betrayals, our unfaithfulness. We are more like Judas than we care to admit.

And it is not only Jesus and his love that we betray in the world, in our lives. We betray ourselves. We hand ourselves over to the night, betraying our life to death, our love to self-interest, and our hope to despair.

And when we do that, turn from the light of Christ to the darkness around us, once again Jesus is troubled in spirit.(4)

verse 2

**2. Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee!
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee;
I crucified thee.**

²⁶ Jesus 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.

²⁷ After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.”

Peter and the others must have been relieved when Jesus dipped the bread and gave it to Judas.(5) We all are. We want Judas to blame rather than consider our sins of unfaithfulness.

John says it was Satan who entered into Judas. John is showing this world’s conflict between good and evil. But John is also showing us God’s atoning work in the midst of the conflict.

So Jesus takes a morsel of bread and dips it in a dish. Of what? Wine? Perhaps. Perhaps olive oil. We do not know. But he hands it to Judas. Jesus shares bread with Judas from his table, his first communion table.

Could this be, dare I say, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet feast? We will all be at that banquet feast seated together, sinners, betrayers, deniers, receiving the gifts of God’s grace and mercy together?

verse 3

**3. Lo, the Good Shepherd for the sheep is offered;
the slave hath sinned, and the Son hath suffered.
For our atonement, while we nothing heeded,
God interceded.**

²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some 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. ³⁰ So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

Some have suggested based on Jesus’ actions, Judas was really the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” Jesus welcomed him to the table, washed his feet, shared bread with him, all the time knowing what he was about to do.

When Jesus handed the dipped morsel of bread to Judas, he was handing over himself to Judas.(6) He was giving his body to be broken. He was showing that God’s love is not contingent on what we do or do not do, sins of commission or sins of omission. God’s love is purely unconditional grace and mercy.

verse 4

**4. For me, kind Jesus, was thy incarnation,
thy mortal sorrow, and thy life's oblation;**

**thy death of anguish and thy bitter passion,
for my salvation.**

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

You know Judas’ betrayal is not the only one in this chapter. The chapter will end with Jesus predicting that Peter will betray him three times. We think of Judas as a sinner and Peter as a saint, but they both betrayed Jesus. That night a piece of bread was dipped in a dish and Judas betrayed. The next day a rooster crowed and Peter denied.

And the next day? “Lord, who is it? Is it I?”(7)

“It is the one with whom I have shared the kingdom,” Jesus would answer, “to whom I have giving bread and drink. It is the one whom I love and for whom I have given my life.”

verse 5

**5. Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,
I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee,
think on thy pity and thy love unswerving,
not my deserving.**

Spy Wednesday. A day to look at Judas and realize we are looking at ourselves. A day to confess our sins and the betrayal of Jesus in our lives. And then remember that we have all been given the bread of life from his table. We have all been washed in the waters of his love. (8)

“Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed”

Notes:

1. Michael K. Marsh, “A Sermon for Wednesday in Holy Week, John 13:21-32,” Interrupting the Silence, April 20, 2011.
2. Michael K. Marsh, “Lord, Who Is It?” A Sermon on John 13:21-32,” Interrupting the Silence, March 27, 2013.
3. Ibid.
4. Marsh, “A Sermon for Wednesday in Holy Week.”
5. Marsh, “Lord, Who Is It?”
6. Marsh, “A Sermon for Wednesday in Holy Week.”
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.