

March 2, 2016  
Luke 22:47-53

Lent Midweek 3  
The Betrayal: A Place of Eternal Love

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Tonight we enter the moment when our Lord is arrested in the Garden. The BETRAYAL. That's what we've called it. And that word sums up the event. *"On the night when He was betrayed..."* we say every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and everyone knows what we mean. But when you read the account more closely, you realize Jesus is not the only one being betrayed here. In the garden this evening, many people are betrayed.

Consider the disciples. A disciple followed his master. That was basic to discipleship: following. *"Come, follow me,"* Jesus said and, in a moment, with the setting down of a net and the walk up from the shore, fishermen became disciples. And yet on this night in the garden, these disciples no longer follow but lead. Luke writes, *"When those who were around Him saw what would follow, they said, 'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?' And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear."* And so the followers takes action, asking a question but not waiting for an answer, praying to God but doing what they want. A servant is struck. An ear is lost and followers are transgressors of God's gracious will. Disciples? Their actions betray them. They are not disciples but something less than that name.

Consider Judas. Lest we forget, Luke reminds us that He is one of the Twelve. But his lips are filled with poison, and his kiss is deadly. He approaches Jesus as a disciple, to kiss his master, but the crowds behind betrays the man. And so we have another betrayal in this text. "One of the Twelve"? Judas is something less than that name.

And then consider the chief priests and elders. Luke informs us that the officers of the temple guard accompany them. They have complained about the oppression of their nation, and yet now they are using force to oppress one of their own. Sitting in the temple, they listened to His teaching and fought with the Scriptures. Here in the night, they are fighting with swords and clubs and the temple guard. These prisoners to foreign rule try to rule in ways foreign to God. And so we have a third betrayal. Leaders of God's people? Their weapons betray them. They are something far less than that name.

Luke helps us see that the story of our Lord's betrayal has something to say about us. Sometimes, you can't trust what you see. Jesus is right when He says, *"This is your hour—when darkness reigns"*. The hour of darkness is not a full-frontal attack in the middle of daylight where armies and weapons destroy. No. The hour of darkness is that time when evil remains hidden. It hides under a kiss, under discipleship, under the leaders of Israel. People may kiss and pray and preach about peace, but underneath it all lies a heart ready for war.

Perhaps you've been in this darkness. It usually catches you by surprise. You're saving for retirement. With corporate downsizing or in most of your cases the price of wheat, sugar

beets, and other crops are not reliable, and the turn in the market, every penny has become precious. Unfortunately, you start to neglect the poverty of others. You cut what is called charitable giving. It's your money after all; you worked for it. And suddenly, your future has become more important than another person's present, and God's call for justice are simply words on a page. You speak about justice and love of God for the poor, but your actions betray you.

You're spending time doing your "discipleship" work. Then no matter what you are doing it doesn't seem to be benefitting the kingdom or the church, so you begin to lose sleep. Then your words become sharp and defensive and you start looking out only for yourself. You speak about discipleship work, but your actions betray you.

The power of darkness doesn't look dark at first; it's deceptive. One day, we're filled with righteous zeal for God's kingdom, pointing out to the world how it has gone astray from God's ways. And then later we discover what has been hidden all the time under our religious zeal and proclamation of holy living: a burning anger and hatred of our neighbor, not a shred of desire for their salvation at all. Luke's account alerts us to this hour of darkness, and we confess this evening how easily it creeps up on us as well.

Yet, this is not the only story Luke has to tell. In this account, Jesus does more than reveal the hour of darkness. He also reveals the eternal love of our Lord. Our Lord enters the hour of darkness and turns it into a place of His eternal Love. In the midst of all of the deception, Luke points to one thing that remains true: what Jesus is seeking to do for them. Jesus never betrays His Father's eternal mission. When His disciples fight, He brings peace. When a slave is injured, He heals. When His enemies come, He willingly submits to the suffering that brings our salvation. In each case, Jesus meets the hour of darkness not by withdrawing but by bringing into this world the eternal kingdom of God.

Take, for example, the healing of the high priest's servant. Luke records that one of the disciples drew his sword and cut off ear of the high priest's servant. The confrontation in the garden is beginning to turn deadly. In the face of this escalating violence, Jesus intervenes to stop the hurting of a slave. Although He will not act in His own defense, Jesus works for the defense of others. Weak enough to be arrested, He is strong enough to heal. And in this moment, He reveals that no matter what is done to Him, He will always remain our Maker, coming into His world to heal His fallen creation. He is who He is, the Son of God, our Savior, and though the powers of darkness rise against Him, He remains strong and obedient to eternal love, for He has come to set us free.

Now, we begin to see that there really is more here than meet the eye. Jesus is revealing to us the power of God's eternal love. For ages, people have trusted that such a love exists. They have waited for God send them a Messiah, one who would set His people free. For three years in Galilee, the people had seen a Savior, had brought their sick to a healer, and had looked for the reign of this Prince of Peace. And now, even in the midst of the power of darkness, we find this Lord being what His name proclaims Him to be. In the face of such oppression, He is and

remains the Anointed One of God. When thrown in a situation where He should protect Himself, He uses His hands to heal another. When given good reason to fight His enemies, He lays down His life for their salvation. When faced with His disciples who were fight for His freedom, He asserts His authority as their leader, a Prince of Peace. The names of Jesus remain true in all situations. He is a Savior, a Healer, a Prince of Peace there in the garden and here, tonight, in our midst.

Have you experienced the power of darkness? Have you found how easily it can slip among us as well? Fear not, for today our Lord comes. Our Savior. He offers forgiveness through His word this night. In the midst of our illness, He comes as our healer. In the midst of our struggle, He bids us His peace. Each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we begin by saying "on the night when He was betrayed." With that statement, we are remembering the hour of darkness in the garden, but we are also remembering every hour of darkness that comes after that. Times when we have been less than our names as Christians. Yet, no matter how often this hour comes among us, God's love remains eternal. He comes to forgive us by His body and blood. Each time we begin with the words, "*On the night when He was betrayed,*" Jesus continues by saying, "Take, eat; take, drink; this is for you." Whether that hour of darkness occurs in the garden or in your home, God's love remains. In eternal love, He continues to come and forgive us of our sin.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, our Lenten King. Amen.*