

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 31, 2019
Luke 22:47-53

In Christ Jesus, who was betrayed by Judas, His disciples, religious leaders and you and me, yet showed everyone eternal love, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We have not moved in our Passion place from last Sunday. We are still in the Garden of Gethsemane. But time has moved. Jesus has finished His agonizing prayer and a crowd of soldiers come up to arrest Him led by His disciple Judas. We don't know if the clouds covered the stars and moon on that night, but we know it was dark, spiritually dark. For it was as Jesus said, the hour of darkness when the powers of darkness would rule.

For tonight is the night of His betrayal. That's what we've called it. And that word sums up the event. Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we say, on the "**night in which He was betrayed . . .**" and everyone knows what we mean. But when we read this account more closely, we realize Jesus is not the only one being betrayed here. In the garden this evening, many people are betrayed.

Consider the disciples. A disciple means follower. A disciple followed his master. "**COME, FOLLOW ME,**" Jesus said and fishermen and others became disciples. And yet on this night in the garden, these disciples no longer follow, but lead. Luke writes, **WHEN THOSE AROUND HIM SAW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN, THEY SAID TO HIM, "LORD, SHALL WE STRIKE WITH THE SWORD?" AND ONE OF THEM STRUCK THE SERVANT OF THE HIGH PRIEST AND CUT OFF HIS RIGHT EAR.** (22:49-50).

And so the followers take action, asking a question but not waiting for an answer, they do what they want. As we know it was Peter who struck out with the sword. An ear is cut off and Jesus' followers sin against God's gracious will. Disciples? Their actions betray them. They are not disciples, but now they lead and do what they want, not caring about what Jesus had told them was going to happen.

Consider Judas. He also was one of the Twelve. But his lips are filled with poison, and his kiss is deadly. He approaches Jesus as a disciple, a follower, to kiss his master, but the crowd behind him betrays him. He is not there to see Jesus out of love, to follow Him out of devotion, but out of greed and hypocrisy he leads a crowd to arrest Jesus. So we have another betrayal in our text. Another of the disciples. Doing what Jesus had prophesied he would do.

And then consider the chief priests and the elders. Luke tells us that the officers of the temple guard accompany them. After years of opposition they are now using force against Jesus. Sitting in the temple, they listened to His teaching and argued with Him about the Scriptures. Here in the dark night, they are fighting with swords and clubs and the temple guard. And so we have a third betrayal. Leaders of God's people? Their weapons betray them. They are not religious leaders caring for their people, for they are protecting themselves, not their people they are to serve.

But Luke also helps us see that this lesson of our Lord's betrayal has something to say about us too. 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 with weapons that destroy. No. The hour of darkness is that time when evil remains hidden. It hides behind a kiss, behind discipleship, behind the leaders of Israel. People may kiss and pray and preach about peace, but behind it all lies a heart that betrays.

I am sure we all have been in this darkness. It usually catches us by surprise. Just one example. You're beginning your family and thinking of your financial future or your approaching your retirement. Every penny has become precious. Unfortunately, you start to neglect the needs of others and the church. You cut back on your charitable giving or it remains stagnant. It's your money after all; you worked hard for it. And slowly your future has become more important than another person's health or well being or the churches outreach with the Gospel. You speak about the love of God in Christ, the spread of the Gospel and the care for the poor and needy, 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, see how the world has gone astray from God and needs His Word and then we discover that we really haven't been that involved with helping them with our gifts, words, and actions, but have been more concerned about ourselves. That is just one example!

Do we see that power of darkness in our lives? Do we betray what it means to be a disciple? Do we go into action even though God has told us not to? Or are we inactive when God tells us to act? Or do we act with others, but not in love, instead thinking more about how it affects us? From our text I hope we all have a deeper understanding of the meaning of "betrayal." Betrayal is not just what happened to Jesus when He was handed over to His enemies. It is what happens to all of us when we hand ourselves over to the power of darkness. After understanding the power of darkness and seeing the many forms of betrayal, let us confess our own sins of betrayal. Luke's account warns us of this hour of darkness, and hopefully leads us to see how easily it creeps up on us as well.

Yet, thankfully that is not the only lesson we learn from Luke's Gospel. In this account, Luke does more than reveal the hour of darkness and betrayal. He also reveals the eternal love of our Lord. Our Lord enters the hour of darkness and betrayal 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 others. Jesus never betrays His Father's eternal mission. When His disciples fight, He brings peace. When a slave is injured, He heals. When Judas betrays Him with a kiss, Jesus reaches out to Him with loving compassion warning Him of what he is doing, seeking to save his soul. His enemies come with swords and clubs, He willingly submits to their arrest and the suffering that brings our salvation. In each case, Jesus meets the hour of darkness not by withdrawing but by showing grace and revealing His kingdom.

Take, for example, the healing of the high priest's servant. We know it was Peter who drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Luke makes it sound as if all the disciples were ready to defend their Lord. The confrontation in the garden is beginning to turn deadly. In the face of this escalating violence, Jesus intervenes to stop the bloodshed. 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 Redeemer, coming into His world to heal, protect and defend 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.

Jesus is revealing to us the power of God's eternal love. For ages people have waited for God to 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 Messiah, the Anointed One of God. When thrown into 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 disciples who were wrongly fighting for His freedom, He asserts His authority as their leader, their 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, everyday, in our midst.

We have experienced the power of darkness. We have found how easily it can slip in among us as well. Do not be afraid, for today our Lord comes to us in His Word. Our Savior offers forgiveness through His Word. In the midst of our illness, He comes as our healer. In the midst of our struggles, He assures us of His peace. Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we begin by saying on the **"night in which 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 upon us and our betrayals as well. Times when we have betrayed our name "Christian" and our name "disciple."

Yet, no matter how often this hour comes upon us, God's love remains eternal. He comes to forgive us by His body and blood hung upon the cross. Each time we begin with the words, on the **"night in which He was betrayed . . ."** Jesus continues by saying, **"Take, eat; take, drink; this is given and shed for you for the remission of your sins."**

Whether that hour of darkness occurs in the garden, in your home, in your place of work, in your school, or even in church, God's love remains true. In eternal love, He continues to come and forgive us our sin.

Jesus enters into a place of betrayal and makes it a place of His eternal love.

Amen.