

Mid-week Lent I
The Passion According to St. Luke: The Plot to Kill Jesus
St. Luke 22:1-6

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

“Betray” is the word of the evening.

Three times in St. Luke’s Gospel Jesus predicted his Passion. Twice in the 9th chapter and once in the 18th chapter, Jesus told His disciples that He was going to suffer, die, and rise again. The second prediction doesn’t go into as much detail, but that second time, Luke 9:43-45, Jesus used the idea of betrayal:

But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

“[T]o be delivered into the hands of men...”—betrayed.

Tonight, you heard that betrayal starting to take shape.

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

For just about the entirety of Jesus’ ministry, the Pharisees and chief priests sought a way to capture Jesus. They didn’t like how He healed people. They were offended at the fact that He forgave people. They were maddened that He claimed that He was the Lord of the Sabbath (as He is), and extended that lordship to His disciples. They refused to come to terms with the fact that Jesus was offering a new way of holiness through Himself. Then, when one of His own gave them the means to make that capture happen, they were overjoyed at the prospects—it was the opportune time that Satan had been waiting for, as you heard in Sunday’s Gospel, and so he entered into Judas called Iscariot.

Betrayal is an interesting concept. If you look the word up in the dictionary, the sense is there but not explicitly stated. In order for one to be betrayed, the betrayal must take place by one whom is trusted or in whom confidence is placed. Only someone who is “on your side” can betray you. This is why, sometimes, betrayal is also known as a cross. The word betray shares the same Latin root as the word traitor. The famous traitor from the history of this country, Benedict Arnold, betrayed the fledgling country to the British, leading a British force against the very men on the American side that he had once also commanded.

So, when Jesus predicted His betrayal to the disciples in Luke 9, it should be no wonder that the saying was hidden from them. Had they understood it, they would likely have deliberated over it and debated it among themselves, being consumed with the thought of who among them would betray Him, and would not be mindful of the things He would be teaching them from that time forward; of course, it wouldn’t be until after His resurrection, that their minds would be opened to all that He had taught them (cf. Luke 24:45), but it stands to reason that they wouldn’t even be able to be reminded of what Jesus had told them, because they would be too consumed with the betrayal even to listen to Jesus from that time. It wasn’t until Jesus reclined at the table with His Twelve at the Last Supper that His betrayal wasn’t concealed from them, and at that time, they did debate among themselves—you’ll

hear more about this next week. However, it is possible, perhaps even likely, that at the time of Luke 9 Judas had no desire to betray Jesus, whether or not he was getting annoyed with Him.

But, the time did come, and Judas did betray Jesus...all for a sum of money. And while Judas' betrayal is at the front and center of tonight's text, his isn't the only betrayal of Jesus. All the other disciples fled when Jesus was arrested. Peter denied Jesus three times when Jesus was before the Council. At one point or another, everyone who followed Jesus, to one degree or another, betrayed Him in one way or another. The disciples had all told Jesus that they were willing to die with Him, but Jesus, predicting Peter's denials, indicated that He and He alone could and would die for the sins of the world.

And those betrayals continue to this day. Hypocrisy is rife in those who call themselves Christian. You believe in Jesus, confess a faith in Him, but with your actions, you betray your confession and your Lord. Your lips say one thing, but your deeds another. Are you really who you say you are? Do you really believe in the Jesus that you confess? Do you, by your actions, deny that Jesus is who He says He is?

There's a stark warning for those who betray and deny Jesus. "[W]hoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:33) You don't want Jesus denying you before the Father. But that's the consequence of saying, "I don't know this Jesus." Jesus says, "I do not know you." (cf. Matthew 25:12; Luke 13:25, 27) Are there any more frightening words to hear from the world's Redeemer? "I do not know you." Betrayal and denial carry the consequence of not being known by Jesus, but that doesn't mean that He doesn't want to know you.

Judas betrayed Jesus, and with it set in motion the events that would lead to Jesus' death and resurrection. He was an instrument in your salvation, although one with evil intent. Jesus knew this and for this purpose chose Judas to be His disciple; He said as much! (cf. John 13:18) Was there hope for Judas? Absolutely, there was. Jesus died for Judas as much as for anyone else! But, Judas, in his despair, ultimately denied Jesus and "turned aside to go to his own place." (cf. Acts 1:25)

The same could be said of Peter and the other disciples. They all abandoned Him, and Peter denied Him three times in a time where, legally, Jesus could have used witnesses in His trials. Was there hope for any of them? Absolutely, there was! And they each were restored to their places as disciples and apostles. Peter's restoration is especially notable. Following His resurrection, Jesus was with His disciples, and He asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?"—once for each time Peter denied Him. After answering in the affirmative all three times, Jesus told Peter to feed and tend His sheep and lambs, restoring him to the office of disciple, and especially of apostle. (cf. John 21:15-17)

Both Judas and Peter betrayed Jesus. Both Judas and Peter were contrite. Both Judas and Peter despaired over what they had done. What was the difference? Peter, in faith, repented. Nowhere in Scripture is that stated overtly, but given the outcomes of both men, one has to conclude that contrition met with faith in Peter and produced repentance. That faith was missing in Judas. Did he ever have it? When did he lose it? Once again, nothing is said so overtly, but if faith doesn't meet contrition, then all that is left is rebellion or utter despair. In despair, Judas hanged himself and "turned aside to go to his own place."

So, you, when you betray your Lord and Savior, you also have hope. Jesus Christ shed His blood and gave His life for you, as much as for Judas and Peter. When that sin is laid bare before you, it produces contrition. And you have been given faith by God to trust that He merciful and gracious toward you for the sake of Jesus. So, that brings you to repentance—all of this done to you and for you and in you from outside of yourself—and in repentance, you joyfully receive these words: you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.