

Lent Midweek 2, Return from Betrayal

1. On this, the second midweek service in Lent, our attention turns to the betrayal and arrest of Jesus.
 - a. The name of Judas has become synonymous with betrayal
 - i. Yet Jesus chose Judas as one of the twelve disciples, he had spent three years in Jesus' company, witnessing the miracles, hearing the message
 - ii. But tonight, we see him in the company of the soldiers arrayed against Jesus, standing in the dark (literally and figuratively), turning the Son of God over to the chief priests and Pharisees who seek to kill Him.
 - b. Our sinful nature includes a propensity to sin by betraying others, even Jesus
 - i. We often feel compelled to do this to save face or gain some benefit.
 - ii. When we look at Judas's betrayal of Jesus and really consider the implications of it, we may feel guilty for the times that we've betrayed our Lord for our own convenience.
 - iii. But tonight...tonight the Gospel shines through as Joseph said to his brothers who had betrayed him into slavery in the land of Egypt: "**As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good**" (Genesis 50:20).
 - iv. Jesus takes our betrayal and crucifies it on the cross overcoming all of our sins and blessing us.
 - c. You'll remember that we are working through a sermon series based on God's call to return to Him found in the promise He gives in Joel 2, "**Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...**" (Joel 2:13)
 - i. We're looking at different events that occurred during Jesus' Passion and relating them to the sins that we've often committed ourselves.
 - ii. But despite the ways that our sins pull us away from God, we hear His call to return because He offers reconciliation and forgiveness.
2. Imagine an instance where someone you trust deeply has betrayed you.
 - a. The details of the betrayal aren't really all that important.
 - i. Perhaps you told this person something in confidence, and she shared it with someone else.
 - ii. Maybe this person pretended to be a supporter, and it turned out that he was manipulating you for personal gain.
 - iii. Many of you may be remembering an event that actually happened to you, betrayal is unfortunately a common experience in our sinful world.
 - iv. Betrayal hurts because it involves a close relationship, it's not surprising to be betrayed by a stranger.
 - b. In our Gospel, the betrayal, of course, is by Judas Iscariot.

- i. He makes a deal with the chief priests and scribes to turn Jesus over to them, knowing full well that their intention is to have Him killed.
 - ii. It's easy for us to recognize the sin in what he did, but it's often a bit harder for us to see our sin when we betray Jesus through our own actions.
 3. First, let's begin by looking at another Biblical betrayal, of King David by his son Absalom and his trusted adviser Ahithophel.
 - a. This is a story about how one sin often begets many others and the consequences of that sin ripple out to impact many people.
 - i. It starts with the adulterous affair between David and Bathsheba.
 - ii. You remember the story: David sees her bathing on the rooftop, initiates an inappropriate affair; she becomes pregnant; he tries to find a way to cover up the sinful liaison, but his plans fail so he makes arrangements to have her husband, Uriah, killed in battle.
 - iii. David is then called out for his sin by the prophet Nathan, he repents, but the baby dies.
 - b. However, because of David's sins of adultery and murder the Lord tells him through Nathan, **"therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife."** (2Sa 12:10)
 - i. One of the ways this plays out is that Absalom, one of David's sons, rebels and attempts a coup.
 - ii. One of the people that Absalom enlists is Ahithophel, a trusted adviser to David, who some believe to be Bathsheba's grandfather.
 - c. As the story unfolds, Ahithophel outlines a plot by which he would raise up an army of twelve thousand men to hunt down and kill David.
 - i. But David had planted a spy in the traitor's camp, Hushai, another trusted adviser who outlined a different plan and Absalom chose to go with his.
 - ii. Of course, Hushai had tipped David off so that he could anticipate Absalom's actions.
 - iii. Ahithophel, distraught over his plan not being followed, perhaps fearing for his life for his part in the coup, killed himself.
 - iv. In the ensuing battle Absalom was killed and David retained the throne.
 - d. But this betrayal haunted David, it even came out in one of his psalms.
 - i. David writes in Psalm 41, **"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me"** (Psalm 41:9).
 - ii. David laments the fact that a trusted adviser, almost certainly Ahithophel, has betrayed him, has turned against him and taken steps to try and kill him in order to place someone else on the throne.
4. We understand the pain that betrayal causes.

- a. But we don't always consider the way our actions amount to a betrayal of Jesus.
 - i. Ahithophel betrayed David in order to put someone else on the throne, and we've done the same thing - betrayed Jesus to put ourselves on the throne.
 - ii. We've denied His lordship and ignored God's Commandments and sought to do things our own way.
 - iii. We've treated others thoughtlessly and elevated ourselves over them, directly contradicting the biblical encouragement to "count others more significant than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3).
- b. And what is the result of our betrayal?
 - i. The Gospel message is blunted. The Good News is blocked.
 - ii. Our Lord commanded that we were to "**go therefore and make disciples of all nations**" (Matthew 28:19), and yet our actions often obscure the Good News.
 - iii. People don't hear or see the love of Christ, because we have pushed Jesus into the background and denied His importance by our words or actions.
- c. None of us like to hear this because it convicts us like Peter did in our reading from Acts as he preached in Jerusalem, "**You denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead**" (Acts 3:14–15).
 - i. But Peter's words end with a familiar encouragement: "**Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.**" (Acts 3:19).
 - ii. It echoes the invitation we heard on Ash Wednesday from Joel: "**Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful...**" (Joel 2:13).
- d. Of course, Jesus knew all of this in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 - i. He knew about Judas's betrayal, but He also knew about ours: that we would fail, that we would betray Him in countless little ways without even intending to do so.
 - ii. And He knew that only He could provide the solution. "**Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given Me?**" (John 18:11).
 - iii. God says, "Return to Me! Even when your words and actions betray me I have already covered you with forgiveness and peace through my Son."
 - iv. He gives us the strength to turn back and we are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and our sins are taken away from us.
- e. May you be encouraged to turn from betrayal and return to God. May you be blessed and strengthened in all that you do, that it may bring glory to Him.