

"Surely Not I?"

Have you ever been betrayed? Sadly, probably most of us can say yes. If you have, you know that betrayal hurts. The pain can run deep. And it hurts the most when the person who betrays you is the closest. If a co-worker you barely know at work stabs you in the back, you aren't happy about it, but you might almost expect it. If a friend betrays you, that can really sting. And if a spouse or parent hurts you, that can leave lifelong scars.

When someone betrays us, they break our trust. We can become furious and heartbroken. Our love for that person can become marred with resentment and pain. We can feel unsafe and vulnerable. We can feel so humiliated, even stupid, for trusting someone so much only to be rejected or tricked or let down. Or we could just be in denial, unwilling, unable, to believe that this person could hurt us so much. Such betrayal can literally seem unbelievable at times. Of course, if you've been on the other end of it; if you've been the one who has betrayed someone like this, you might even find it hard to believe. You might even find it hard to believe that you could do something like this and hurt someone so much.

And of course if you have been offended like this, offering forgiveness to that person can be difficult. Frankly it can seem impossible. Even if the other person is seeking your forgiveness, our heart might not be willing to grant it. And even when there is forgiveness, that doesn't instantly restore the shattered trust.

In our passage for today, Jesus predicts his own betrayal. He knows betrayal. One of his closest friends would betray him to his death. As we read in last week's passage, Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, part of Jesus' inner circle, conspired with the chief priests and scribes to hand Jesus over to them. He received thirty pieces of silver from them as their payment. Now Judas just needed to find the right time to hand him over. In other words, at this point in the Gospel of Mark, Judas hadn't completed his betrayal quite yet. He had initiated the betrayal. He had got things rolling, but there was still time to back out if he wanted. But that would not happen. Jesus tells us that right here. He knows that Judas would complete what he started. He knew Judas would betray him. And so in this passage Jesus predicts his betrayal. That is amazing: that he knowingly entrusted himself to someone who would break that trust. Why? Why does Jesus allow himself to be betrayed? And why he is telling this to the twelve here? Let's study this passage to find out.

Look first at verse 12. Mark gives us an important setting to start out. I want to begin by thinking about the setting. Since the Triumphal Entry in chapter 11, we've been in the last week of Jesus' life. We've been seeing the cross right in the cross hairs of Jesus' life. Now we are heading quickly to the climax. And so in verse 12, we're told that it is the first day of the Unleavened Bread feast when the people would kill the Passover lamb. And so right away, Mark highlights death. This is the day when the sacrificial Passover lamb is slaughtered. In one sense this is a helpful piece of information to tell us what day it was. But in light of the last passage and in light of what is discussed in this passage, I think Mark is being suggestive here. He is drawing us to see Jesus' sacrificial death. In the last passage Jesus told us that the woman anointing him was preparing him for his burial. Last passage we saw Judas plotting with the religious leaders to kill Jesus. Now in this passage we are still talking about how Jesus would be betrayed to his death. Mark is setting the context for us: we are stilling looking toward

Jesus' imminent death. A death that would be like the Passover lamb: a sacrificial death. Yes, I know Mark doesn't come out and tell us that in so many words, but how can we not read this and think about that in light of the context.

And so it was the day of the Passover Feast. This is essentially the first day of the celebration of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, which would then last seven more days when only unleavened bread was eaten. And so Jesus and the twelve disciples are going to be celebrating Passover this evening. This would have been Thursday of the Passion week. The traditional church calendar often calls this Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday. This is when the twelve disciples are with Jesus for the Last Supper. This will be the last meal they share together before Jesus is arrested and crucified. Of course this Last Supper is when Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, the holy sacrament of Communion. We'll read and talk about that in next week's passage. But here we learn that this Last Supper was a celebration of Passover.

And that's exactly how our passage begins. In verse 12 we see the disciples ask Jesus where he wants to celebrate the Passover at so that they can go get things ready. That's an important question, because it shows that Jesus is the one who is going to be the host of this Supper. They'll essentially be borrowing a room from someone in the city, but Jesus will be the host. In the Passover celebration, there was always a head of the house who led things. Jesus is going to be that head, as is rightfully the case. And so the disciples ask Jesus where he would like them to prepare things for the meal.

And so Jesus sends two disciples and tells them exactly who they'll find in the city to give them accommodations for the meal. He tells them to look for a man with a water jar. That alone would be a bit out of the ordinary to see a man carrying a water jar. Usually women would be carrying the water jars. But then when they follow the man as Jesus instructs, they find that he has a perfect room for them. Everything is already furnished and ready for them to use for the Passover meal. Verse 16 almost makes this sound like prophecy. Jesus predicted all these things to them, and then when the two go on their task, everything happens just as Jesus told them it would.

So my point in looking at this setting is this. Everything is happening according to plan, God's plan. Jesus' betrayal is part of God's plan according to verse 21. God allows Judas to betray him. But the betrayal was part of a larger plan where Christ was coming to be a sacrifice. It wasn't coincidence that Jesus was here at this time during the Passover. Jesus is the ultimate Passover lamb. He would die on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of God's people. And so Jesus tells us about the betrayal in the context of the Passover feast because he wants us to see what his death represented. He wants us to understand why the Scriptures wrote that the Christ must suffer in this way. He wants us to see how his death serves as a ransom for men.

And so just in case you are not aware, let me remind you about the Passover. The annual Passover feast commemorated the first Passover. That's when the Israelite people were slaves in Egypt, and God brought them out with a miracle. God killed all the first born sons in Egypt as a judgment against the evil Pharaoh who wouldn't release the Israelites. But God spared the Jewish sons. All they had to do was kill an unblemished lamb and paint its blood around the frame of the door to their house. Then when God sent his angel to kill all the firstborn sons, he passed over those houses with the shed blood on them. This was the 10th plague against the Egyptians. Their firstborn sons and animals were killed. And any who had the Passover lamb blood around their doors were spared. The lamb died so that the sons could be spared. Jesus would be the ultimate Passover lamb. John the

Baptist called Jesus the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus would die not to save us from the slavery of the Egyptians or to preserve our earthly lives. Jesus would die to save us from the slavery of sin and to preserve our eternal lives.

So that's the importance of this Passover setting as Jesus announces his betrayal that would lead to his death. That's my first point. It sets the context of his mission: his sacrificial death which is fast approaching. And so it's in the middle of the Passover meal when all of a sudden Jesus makes a solemn announcement. Verse 18. He starts out with "assuredly." Again, this is Jesus' way to introduce something very serious and important. It's the word "amen" in the Greek. "Amen, I say to you." And so here they are all participating in this formal Passover meal when Jesus makes a big announcement. "One of you will betray me. One of you who are eating right now with me on this special Passover meal. One of you will betray me." What? At least eleven of these men must have been in shock. Though maybe Judas was also in shock for another reason - he realized Jesus knew.

Of course they knew that Jesus would be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. At least that's what Jesus had already told them would happen. Back in chapter 10, Mark records Jesus giving a third prediction about his suffering and death. And in that prediction Jesus specifically said he would be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes. But now Jesus flushes this out for them. He'd be delivered over by one of his own. One of his closest friends and disciples would betray him. Of course we saw earlier in this chapter Judas conspiring with just these people: the chief priests and scribes. And so Jesus has known all along what would happen. But he continues to clarify to his disciples what was coming.

And so of course the disciples were in shock. They all questioned even themselves, "Is it I?" But Jesus affirms the same thing again in verse 20. It would be one of the twelve. One of the twelve! Part of Jesus' inner circle. His handed picked disciples whom he has shared everything with. The ones whom he had been preparing to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. The ones whom he had explained in private all the parables even. His closest friends. One of *them* would betray him.

Jesus says in verse 20, one even "who dips with me in the dish." This is talking about sharing a meal together. And of course that's what they were doing right now. They were sharing the Passover meal together that Jesus was hosting. This echoes Psalm 41 verse 9, which says, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." We looked at that Psalm last week and talked about how Christ is the fulfillment of it, so I won't go into that again today. But I do think Jesus alludes to that Psalm here. As God who has become man, Jesus has taken on our plight, even the heartache of betrayal, and yet was without sin.

Of course it would be through that betrayal that Jesus would serve as a sacrificial lamb. It would be through that betrayal that Jesus would save his people from their sins. And so it was according to God's plan that this would happen. But that didn't excuse Judas. Just look at verse 21. "The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born." Just because God planned to use a human's sin for something good, doesn't excuse the sin. God often takes what man intends for evil and turns it around for good. It's ironic, but fitting, that God would use one of the worst acts of evil for the greatest good of all time.

But Jesus says "woe." "Woe, to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed." Woe. If you're not sure what that means, let me tell you - it's not a good thing. This

is Christ declaring curse and damnation. The person who betrays the Christ is under condemnation. In other words, this will lead to this betrayer's eternal damnation. His betrayal without repentance means that he has rejected the Christ. He has rejected the only way of salvation. The only way is through Jesus. If you reject him, you are eternally damned. That's why it would be better for him to never be born. Sometimes people ask me if Judas Iscariot will be in heaven. This is one verse that tells us he will not. John 17:2 calls him the son of perdition, which also tells us that he is damned to hell.

So this is my second point. Jesus announced that he would be betrayed, and it would be a very close betrayer. That makes this betrayal all the more horrendous. It was not just anyone betraying him. Jesus shows how deplorable this is. One of his very own, from his own inner circle, who even eats with him. One of these would betray him. And this would mean damnation for his betrayer. This was an awful thing for Judas. It was an awful thing for Judas to do. And it would be an awful fate for him as well.

And so that leads me to my final point for today. Despite how awful Judas would be, we see Christ's compassion and mercy come out here one final time for Judas. I began our sermon today asking why Jesus would tell the disciples about this betrayal. Well certainly it's prophecy and after the fact it would show the disciples how Jesus gloriously foretold everything that would happen. But Jesus is doing more than just prophesying. This is more than just about a prediction. Jesus is once again ministering to his disciples. Even to Judas.

You see verse 21 is a warning. It's a warning to Judas. It's a warning of his fate should he go through with his plan to betray Jesus. You see, it's not too late for Judas to turn back. He could still return the thirty pieces of silver. Of course, he won't. We know that. Jesus even knows that he won't. But he still warns him, doesn't he? This is nothing new. We see God in Scripture still warn those who are part of the reprobate. Part of those who won't repent and follow God. But God still gives them warnings. Think of Cain in Genesis 4. Cain was angry and jealous that his brother was pleasing God and he was not. God took the time to warn Cain and direct him away from sin. But of course, that was just before Cain would murder his brother Abel. Obviously God knew that Cain would choose to kill his brother. But God still warned Cain. God still directed Cain in the right path. This is all a part of the way God is both merciful and compassionate, while also being just and righteous. He repeatedly shows his compassion to man by warning them and calling them to salvation, while at the same time leaving them without excuse when they decide instead to rebel against God.

And that's what he's doing with Judas. Here Judas is part of the twelve. He's partaking of the Passover together. He's what you might call, part of the visible church. Visibly, he looks like a Christian. He looks like a follower of Christ. He even receives the outward benefits of being a Christian - he's partaking in the Passover meal. And so outwardly, he appears to be a Christian. Soon, we'll see that he really isn't. But Jesus knew. Jesus knew where his heart really was. And so Jesus compassionately offers this final warning. He tells him where his sin is leading: to eternal damnation. In the end, Judas is left without excuse.

But notice that Jesus doesn't give this warning only to Judas. Jesus knew it was Judas who would betray him. The gospel of John makes that abundantly clear. But Jesus gives this warning to *everyone*. All of the 12 were given this warning. But this too was fitting. This too is an expression of Christ's compassion and grace.

You see, Jesus knows who the betrayer is. He knows that Judas is really a reprobate, predestined to damnation. But the other disciples did not. And so the

warning is given to all. And it has a tremendous effect on them. Look at verse 19. The disciples began to be sorrowful. They ask, "Is it I?" Actually in the Greek, it's a very emphatic question; and it's put in the negative. Literally, it's, "Surely not I?" Surely not I? Jesus' warning to Judas, had a positive effect on the rest of them. To Judas, his warning just fell on deaf ears. But to the rest, it caused them to look inward. It gave them the opportunity to self-reflect; to examine themselves. This of course is very fitting as they were partaking in the very first Lord's Supper. We know that Scripture tells us to examine ourselves before we take Communion. Here they do that.

Notice that Jesus doesn't answer them here. They each ask, "Surely not I." and Jesus doesn't answer them. He doesn't say, "No, no, don't worry, it's Judas." Instead he gives them this opportunity to reflect on where they are at. This is a healthy thing to regularly do. We should do this especially at Communion, but throughout our Christian walk. Surely, Christ's warning of hell must have echoed inside them as they self-reflect.

You see, their response is so interesting. Surely the eleven would have known what they had planned. They would have known that they weren't planning to betray Jesus. You think they could have found assurance in themselves. They could have said definitively, "it's not me." Instead it says that *each one of them* ask this question. Surely not I? It's as if, even if they hadn't yet planned to betray Jesus, it's almost as if they were afraid they might be capable of such a thing. As if they could imagine themselves able to do that, even if they weren't planning to do it. I think they were genuinely self-reflecting. I think they were trying to be honest with themselves and were scared at their own depravity. You see, I think if we are honest with ourselves, we realize just how easy it would be for us to be like Judas. If we live in a world where betrayal is so common, is it that farfetched to think about how we could betray Jesus. The disciples themselves will shortly be scattered when Jesus is arrested. They will deny knowing Jesus. They will flee. They would turn their backs on Jesus. That's not that far from betrayal. But Jesus would restore the eleven. And he's there to restore us too when we fall short.

You see, Jesus gave this warning to all the twelve disciples, because this is something we all need to do. We all need to regularly examine ourselves. We need to realize that we are not that much different than Judas. We could all conceivable betray Jesus like Judas did. But I am here today to tell you that it is only by the grace of God that we do not. For we have not only been born into this world, but we have been born again. We have been born again into a new life that loves Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

You see, Jesus knew Judas would betray him. Jesus predicts it here. That alone is amazing; that he knowingly entrusted himself to someone who would break that trust. And yet he endured this for a reason. He willingly endured this betrayal, and the shame of the cross, for us. He allowed himself to be betrayed, handed over to the religious leaders, and killed on the cross, so that we could have new life. So we could have new life everlasting. Life that begins even now. Life that helps us in our own struggles with betrayal; and life that extends on to eternity, where one day we will no longer taste of betrayal any longer. On that day, we will not be tempted to betray anyone, let alone our Lord. And we will not be betrayed by anyone.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, this passage gives us a call for self-examination. Look around. What you see here is the visible church. It is not the invisible church. The visible church is made up of both the elect and the reprobate. That means it has people in here that may be truly Christian and ones that might not be.

We can't know for sure by looking at people with human eyes. Only God knows. There are people who sit in the pews and receive the outward benefits of Christ's church, who aren't really Christian. Maybe some of you even *used* to be like that? Maybe some of you still are. Maybe some of you attended church for years before you finally came to a real saving faith in Jesus. Maybe some of you still haven't.

That is why Jesus calls us to self reflect. That is why this passage reminds us the importance to be examining ourselves. That is one great benefit of our monthly Communion service. But it's not only limited to then either. We need to regularly examine our lives.

You know, in once sense it is so sad that we have to ask this question, "Surely not I." When we see the disciples asking that, we say, "How can you have any doubt?" You have seen so much! You have witnessed all of Christ's ministry! But just look at us. We too have seen so much. We have tasted so much of Christ's blessings. And yet we know how enticing temptation can be. We know how attractive sin can still be to us, even though we've tasted of Christ's grace. You see, when we self-reflect, it should humble us. It should cause us to have godly sorrow at the sin that is still in our lives. It should cause us to reflect on what areas we need to pray for growth.

Now of course a danger in this self examination is that some of us have very tender consciences that end us doubting if we are saved. We look at ourselves and see how sinful we still are, and then Satan tries to lie to us: Oh, look you are not really a Christian. If you believe that line, then he's actually right. But this self-examination is not about works righteousness. You don't self reflect in order to earn your assurance through godly living. No, that's not what you are to do in examining yourself. What you do is simple. You recognize your sin, you grieve over it, but you finally turn to Christ.

You see it's about trust. You are trusting Jesus to save you, even though you are a sinner. Judas didn't trust Jesus. He betrayed Jesus. He broke trust with Jesus. Judas didn't think Jesus' plan was what he needed. But when we examine ourselves we need to keep going back broken to Jesus. Not in a manipulative way. Not in a way that's trying to live wickedly and just have a get out of jail free card. No in a way that genuinely recognizes your need for Christ to forgive you. It's all about trust. Trust in Jesus. Trust in his forgiveness. And pray that he will grow you in godliness. Then trust in that too. And then live in light of that trust. Trust in Jesus.

You know that's what trust involves. If you trust in a chair, you sit in it. Well if you trust in Christ, you will begin to act accordingly as well. Live your life as a life of trusting in Christ.

Saints of God, take heart that our trust is not misplaced if it is Christ. Even if our closest friends and loved ones betray us in this world, we do not need to fear trusting Christ. He will not betray us. He won't break our trust. Rather, he has already tasted even the sting of betrayal for us. He was betrayed so that we will not be rejected by God, but warmly welcomed and accepted by God. He was betrayed so that we could be brought into the closest of relationships with God. So that we could be made a child of God and the bride of Christ. We live in that assurance even as we look forward to his coming again. Amen.

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