

Lenten Midweek 2025  
The Arrest of Christ and Devotion  
(The Antithesis of Rank Betrayal)  
Zechariah 13:1-9  
Matthew 26:47-56

Betrayal is a bitter topic. One must be vulnerable on some level to experience the anguish of being betrayed. A hardened heart doesn't know the emotional pain that treachery brings. Et tu, Brute? Those are the pained words that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Julius Caesar when he discovers that his trusted friend Brutus is among his assassins. You as well, Brutus? Caesar didn't see it coming. Most of us don't see betrayal coming.

"I'm looking through you. Where did you go? I thought I knew you. What did I know? You don't look different but you have changed. I'm looking through you. You're not the same. Your lips are moving. I cannot hear. Your voice is soothing. But the words aren't clear. You don't sound different, I've learned the game. I'm looking through you; you're not the same. Why, tell me why, did you not treat me right? Love has a nasty habit of disappearing overnight." In this Beatles tune, Paul McCartney is lamenting the vacuous love of a woman who isn't truly committed to him. She had become transparent, empty. Her love had disappeared, and she disappeared with it. Judas is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. Where did he go? What could've prompted such an act of betrayal? Jesus saw it coming but that doesn't make it any less painful. In an ironic twist, God's plan and Jesus' enemies' plan coalesce, they merge as one. God means it for good. Judas and his lot mean it for ill. These two plans come from completely opposite perspectives but they both agree: "Jesus must die."

The irony is rich in Gospel content. Jesus' antagonists attempt to wrest control over the Son of God, but their vengeful hatred is made to serve God's greater purpose. Even though the Lord's enemies formulated their plan with elaborate precision, it is still God's higher purposes that are being carried out. One can never outflank the Almighty, His wisdom, His schematic of salvation, His truth, His justice, His empty tomb. Judas remains an enigma. Hypocrisy is a substantial commodity, but it renders people transparent, renders them empty. Are you familiar with emptiness? Judas comes into the Garden of Gethsemane leading a large crowd of the Temple Guard. "Greetings, Rabbi!" the betrayer glibly intones. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' disciples call Him "Lord." Judas calls Him "Rabbi" (Matthew 8:25; 14:28, 30; 17:4; 26:22 ~ 26:25, 49). The transparent Judas kisses Jesus. What do you make of that?

"The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (Queen Gertrude). It's another line from Shakespeare, this time from Hamlet. A "protest" in this context is a vow or a declaration of fidelity or commitment. Judas kisses the Lord in a vacuous display and empty devotion; it's completely fake. It appears friendly, but it is a signal to his co-conspirators that Jesus is the one to arrest. Judas' kiss leads to a bogus arrest. A bogus arrest leads to a bogus trial. A bogus trial leads to a bogus verdict. A bogus verdict leads to a horrific death. It is a filthy kiss. I'm looking through you, where did you go? I thought I knew you. What did I know? You don't look different but you have changed. I'm looking through you. You're not the same. Jesus calls Judas "friend." Is it a term of ambivalence or sadness or is it perhaps a warning to Judas that Judas' status has changed? Only after Jesus gives Judas permission to do what Judas had come

to do those with swords and clubs lay hands on Jesus. “Friend, do what you came to do” (Matthew 26:50). Even though Judas’ plan is unfolding according to his supposed design, the Lord Christ is the Field Marshal in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Devotion; what do you think of your devotion to the Lord Christ? Is devotion the opposite of betrayal? When you look at Judas, what do you see? Was Judas simply manipulated by the much guiltier, much more sinister chief priests? The formal definition for “betray” is “to expose one’s country, a group or a person to danger by treacherously giving information to an enemy.” I would define it more broadly – to violate a trust, to be disloyal, unfaithful, to bring harm to another by a cavalier approach to their needs. I have discovered that the more folks rely on you the more risk there is in betraying their trust. Do you have people that rely on you? Do you realize what a privilege that is? Christians are a body of believers. This beautiful congregation is a body of believers. Each part is related to the others. Whether one takes it seriously or not, we are connected and each of us can be either assisted or hindered by our brothers and sisters in Christ. Equally true, you can assist this body or, conversely, you can hinder the esprit the corps of Christ the King Lutheran Church by your devotion or lack thereof.

Judas was not a blessing to his brothers. In the OT, the Israelites were in a life and death battle with the Amalekites. Moses surveyed the battle from the top of a hill. When Moses held up his staff, the staff of God, Joshua and his men prevailed. When Moses wearied and dropped his arms, Amalek and his men surged. When Moses strength waned, Aaron and Hur came to Moses aid. They held Moses hands aloft until the setting of the sun. Amalek was overwhelmed and put to the sword (Exodus 17:8-15). Have your brothers and sisters in Christ ever held your arms up? That is devotion. In this place we are called to devotion, first for God and then for each other. Devotion in Christ’s church is an allegiance unlike any other. In season and out of season, we are Christ’s people and His allegiance to us never fails. To know His love is to be set free from whatever it is that plagued Judas. Peter denied that he knew Jesus after the Lord of glory was arrested. Love has a nasty habit of disappearing overnight. But Peter was reinstated. “Simon, son of John, do you love me? Yes Lord; you know that I love you. Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-19). According to tradition, St. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome under Nero in the year AD 68. Devotion reached full bloom in Peter.

We stand in as beautiful a time to live as any in history. Our land is beautiful, our freedoms are beautiful, our economy blesses us; the protection from war is a monumental blessing; materially speaking, we are as fortunate a people as has ever lived. Christ’s Word, His life, is celebrated here. The light of Christ shines in this place. The Lord God Almighty oversees all these gifts. Devotion is to be perpetually in bloom here. A life of faith is a life of truth, a life that builds on the rock that does not move no matter what storm may blow (Matthew 7:24-27). When Christ was arrested it was as the prophet had spoken: “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (Zechariah 13:7). The Good Shepherd was indeed struck and struck viciously. The disciples were scattered. And Christ reconstituted them. How? By rising from the dead. Jesus was devoted to His Father’s will. That devotion saved your life. His blood saved your life. His death saved your life. Jesus’ body is the most substantial thing that there has ever been. His love for us is the steadiest of realities, it does not change. Our lives are predicated on His devotion. Surely that swells your heart and provides a confidence that enables you to meet the challenges

that will inevitably come in this broken world. He was betrayed and arrested; His love endures forever (Psalm 136).