

Tonight, it's hard to like Judas, isn't it? It can be tough to like such a lying, two-faced, double-crossing, hypocrite, can't it? I mean, what kinda person deceives someone like Jesus, such a faithful friend—I wanna know? And for what, thirty pieces of silver! Honestly, just the idea that he could dip his bread in the very same bowl as Jesus—knowing the whole time he's about to stab Jesus in the back—it's enough to make anybody not like Judas very much. Tonight, it's hard to like Judas.

And what might make it even more difficult is that, for many of us, we know what it's like to be betrayed. Maybe that wound in your back where the knife had been still has yet to heal. Was it your best friend . . . a trusted family member . . . your own spouse even? Isn't it interesting how the people you love the most are the ones who hurt you the worst. They dipped their bread in the same bowl as you, knowing full-well how they'd betray you. And for what, what was their thirty pieces of silver? Yeah, when you've sat where Jesus sits tonight, it can be easy not to like someone like Judas.

Y'know, this Gospel story reminds me of another story in the Bible. It's also a story of betrayal, yes, but it wasn't for thirty pieces of silver. No, the betrayal I'm reminded of was for a woman—I bet you know the story of David and Bathsheba. You might remember how after getting Bathsheba pregnant, David tries to cover things up by giving her husband Uriah military leave so he could go home to her. David thinks if Uriah spends the night with Bathsheba around the same time that everyone will think the baby is Uriah's and not David's. But Uriah, being such a good guy, tells David that he couldn't possibly go home to eat and drink and make love to his wife, while the rest of his comrades are at war.

But David's determined, so he hatches another scheme. He invites Uriah to dine with him at the royal palace. See, David hopes that Uriah will get drunk enough he'll forget all about his comrades and instead want to get amorous with Bathsheba—but Uriah still doesn't. And that's why this story reminds me of tonight's Gospel. Like Judas, here's David probably dipping his bread in the same bowl as Uriah, knowing the whole time how his child's growing inside Uriah's wife. And as they dined together, David's probably plotting to get Uriah out of the picture altogether should things not go according to plan. It's nothing short of Judas at the Last Supper.

But y'know, there's something else that's reminding me of this story tonight. Here's what I mean—after David eventually puts Uriah on the frontlines to get killed, and David takes Bathsheba as his wife, David gets paid a visit by the prophet Nathan. The first thing Nathan tells David is a story. On the one hand, Nathan says, there's this rich man, who has lots of sheep, and then on the other hand there's this poor man who has only one little lamb. In fact, the lamb is so dear to the poor man, it's like a member of the family. But when the rich man one day has company in town, he doesn't take one of his many sheep to prepare for his guest. No, he takes the one and only lamb from the poor man. And upon hearing this story, David jumps up in anger and says, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die!" Then, looking at David point blank, Nathan says, "David, that man is you!"

Tonight, while we're pointing the finger at Judas, Nathan the prophet's got his finger pointed in our direction. He reminds us that you and I are the pot calling the kettle black. When it comes to our loyalty to Jesus, are you and I really all that different from Judas? I mean, here we come together every Sunday around our Lord's Table, sharing a meal with Jesus, dipping our bread in His bowl. And then we go out from here, and what do we do? Do we show Jesus how faithful we can be? Do we show everyone what devoted disciples we are? Or even before it's Monday, even before we're out of the parking lot, even before the service is over, in our heart of hearts do we already show disloyalty toward Jesus?

I don't know if you ever thought of sin that way before—as a kind of betrayal—but it is. And if we were to add up all of our duplicitous thoughts, words, and actions, I wonder if we wouldn't have out-betrayed even Judas. And for what, what is our thirty pieces of silver—a fleeting thrill . . . a little gain . . . a petty power grab? It's no wonder we don't like people like Judas—people like Judas remind us of ourselves.

But funny thing—while we talk about liking and disliking, Jesus never uses those words. In fact, in none of the four gospels does Jesus ever say anything about what He likes or dislikes—Jesus never says anything about that. No, instead, tonight we are reminded of one small but powerful word Jesus does use—and uses a lot!

Here's the word Jesus uses so much:

He says, "*Love your enemies*".

He says, "For God so *loved* the world, that He gave His one and only Son".

He says, "Greater *love* has no one than this: that he lay down his life for the sake of his friends."

*Love* is the word Jesus uses again and again . . . and again—75 times in the gospels to be exact, with more than half of those in the Gospel of John. Which is how tonight got its name—Maundy Thursday comes from the word *mandatum*, which is Latin for mandate or command. Tonight, Maundy Thursday, gathered around the Lord's Table, Jesus gives us a new mandate, a new command—to love one another. Everyone will know we're His disciples by how we love one another. Because nobody else in the whole wide world has ever loved the way Jesus loves.

See, tonight's not at all about betrayal—it's not about Judas. But it's about love—the kind of love only Jesus could have. I mean, think about it this way—Here's Jesus, knowing full-well who this Judas guy will turn out to be, and Jesus *still* handpicks him to be a disciple. Here's Jesus, knowing all the while what Judas will do to Him, and Jesus *still* sticks by him for three whole years, through the good times and the bad. Here's Jesus, fully aware of how tonight's gonna go, and Jesus *still* invites him to His going away party even—His Last Supper tonight. Knowing everything the whole time, Jesus *still* dips His bread in Judas' bowl. No betrayal stands a chance against such faithful, loyal, devoted love!

And such love won't quit tonight, but will carry Jesus, tomorrow, to a cross. On that cross, Jesus will pay for the very sin that put Him there—even for Judas Jesus will die. And what for, what's Jesus' thirty pieces of silver? A sinner . . . a dirty, rotten, stinking—*beloved*—sinner. God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And if that's how Jesus loves someone like Judas, just think how much He loves you! Jesus knows how things will probably go with you. Yet He *still* calls you to be His disciple. Jesus *still* sticks by you through thick and thin. Jesus *still* invites you to His supper table tonight, still dips His bread in your bowl. And tomorrow, Good Friday, you'll see how He loves you to death. And for what, not thirty pieces of silver, but for the likes of the thirty or so of us, His *beloved*, gathered here tonight. God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The real tragedy tonight isn't the betrayal. No, it's that this side of heaven, Jesus could love Judas so much . . . and he'd never know it. But I can't help but wonder if on the other side Judas eventually found out. Tonight, you and I don't have to repeat that tragedy. But we can begin to grasp just how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Gathering us around His table, our Lord tells us of His great love for us, "Take, eat;" He says, "this is My body." Jesus says, "Take, drink; this is My blood, shed for your forgiveness." God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.