

Series- "Countdown to the Cross"

Message- "Betrayed"

Scripture- John 18:1-14

Countdowns lead to a particular moment in time and culminate in a particular noteworthy event. Just over two months ago, we were all counting down at midnight to the start of 2012. If you were anywhere near a news outlet two weeks ago you likely saw vintage footage of the countdown to ignition of the rocket that sent John Glenn and his tiny mercury capsule into orbit fifty years ago. David Letterman's countdowns lead viewers to believe that the number one reason is going to be the best of all. This year's super bowl found fans of both teams watching the clock as the game came down to one final play.

This morning we start a four-week countdown to the most important moment in all history. You can read all about these events in the first four books of the New Testament. These gospels form a mini-biography of the life and ministry of Jesus. He started his ministry beside a little river about twenty miles to the east of Jerusalem. His ministry would be crushed (so it was thought) at the other end of those twenty miles. In this "Countdown to the Cross" series, we will unpack the last few hours of the story.

We enter into these events during the night before Jesus dies. Jesus and his disciples met to share in the carefully prescribed Passover supper. From the moment they were in the room, Jesus did far more than lead them through the routines associated with that meal. He taught them about godliness and selflessness by his words and actions. And then they went out into the dark of the city streets.

What awaits them? If you were to sit down and read any one of the gospel accounts straight through, you would come to this point in the story and know that nothing good is going to happen. If this were a movie I was watching as a child, I would now close my eyes or scrunch down in my theater seat to avoid what is to come. Or, I would mutter under my breath, "Don't go to the garden, don't go to the garden," hoping somehow the characters will hear me and alter their steps. But, that can't happen here anymore than in the film of my childhood.

There is good in these moments. The time Jesus shared that night with his followers had been full of meaning. He prayed for them. They sang. That's got to be good. Right? They had each other. They went to a place they often went. It was a garden and that brings images of beauty and peace. It's a place where they can sit and look out over the little valley and see the lights of the city, a place of comfort, safety and rest.

Then all hell breaks loose as the light of torches and lanterns form the prelude to the arrival of soldiers and Jewish officials. They are out to do no good. They confront the group they find there. There is an interrogation of sort. And there is betrayal. Betrayal is nasty, nasty business.

Let's take a look at our text for the morning. Take out your bibles or the ones we provide under chairs near you to John chapter eighteen, verse one. As you are doing

that, let me pray for us. God, there is no more gut wrenching figure in all of Scripture than Judas, the betrayer. We need your Spirit to be strongly at work in us. Prepare us, protect us, provoke us and provide for us as we yield ourselves to your word right now. Amen. Remember, this is God's holy word. [READ John 18:1-14.] Every time we read God's word, he intends that His Spirit will give us understanding. I pray that this will be true for each of us here this morning.

Thomas Merton, contemplative brother during the 20th Century of the Abbey of Gethsemani writes, "The joy of the . . . love of God springs from a liberation from all self-hood by the annihilation of every trace of pride. This runs deep and is counter-intuitive to our culture. We are trained to think "self-esteem," "my perspective," and "my way.". We think "I" is everything. Merton, echoing Jesus affirms, "The only way to possess His greatness is to pass through the needle's eye of your own absolute insufficiency.

Oh, that the way of Judas would have been different! Rather than his own sufficiency, rather than exalt self, he would have annihilated every bit of pride. He would have bypassed the betrayal, bypassed the garden. But, he did not. Here is a statement from Proverbs fourteen that seems to me to sum up his reality:

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. (Proverbs 14:30)

Eugene Peterson's translation of this passage in *The Message*, refers to Judas as one who "stood out like a sore thumb". Earlier in the evening he was with Jesus and the eleven. Now he was with the enemy. "Are you with me?" a heroic figure might shout out as he prepares to advance toward a specified goal. And the betrayer's answer is a deafening, "No!" delivered in a silent kiss.

There have been other famous betrayers. Among them are King David who betrayed his people, his wife and Urriah the Hittite, Ephialtes the shepherd who betrayed Leonidas and the three hundred Spartans at Thermopylae, Brutus and Cassius who betrayed Julius Caesar, Benedict Arnold who betrayed the American Revolution and West Point.

There have been other betrayers of less renown: co-worker, classmate, spouse, child, fellow soldier, team member, church member, friend, pastor or parent. In any walk of life, at any time of life, someone might decide to betray you or the group to which you both belong.

Let's take a look at what we know about Judas and his betrayal. "Must we? Can't we just close our eyes and scrunch down in our seats and pretend it's not real?" you might plea. "No," is my reply. We need to look at the whole teaching of Scripture as we countdown to the cross. So, with eyes and hearts wide open, let's forge ahead as we survey everything the bible tells us about Judas—or at least what we can reasonably conclude.

Let's start with Jesus. He chose Judas to be one of the twelve. Like a few of the others, we don't know the specifics of that call. Some have said Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would be the betrayer. I'm not sure Scripture is clear on this matter. After all, Jesus indicated on more than one occasion that some things were only known to God, the father. Jesus included Judas on all ministry excursions. Jesus expected Judas, like the other eleven, would learn to live under his authority as rabbi. Jesus knew that one of them would betray him and eventually knew that person was Judas. Jesus controls the timing of the betrayal by saying to Judas during the Passover supper, "Go quickly. Do what you are going to do." What a remarkable thing! Jesus submitted to God's will by submitting to betrayal when he could have stopped Judas in his tracks.

Now let's turn to Judas. I do not think Judas accepted Jesus' invitation with traitorous intentions. I believe that his pride rose at some point. We know he was a lover of money, became miserly, uncaring and rude. He was also a thief. We are told that he helped himself to some of the contributions to the ministry. He offered up Jesus for a price. I'm not at all sure that Judas' primary motivation was money, since the amount he was paid was so insignificant. He would have been better off financially to keep dipping into the ministry funds.

Maybe he got his feelings hurt along the way. Someone hurt or who takes offense is always a likely candidate for betrayal. Was this true of Judas? He was not a Galilean as most of the twelve were. His full name, Judas Iscariot, most likely denotes the town where he was raised far to the south. He's never named for anything stellar in the gospels. When he is mentioned, it's in a bad light, so it is possible the other disciples looked down on him.

Maybe Judas didn't like the way Jesus treated him. After all, it was Jesus he betrayed. Jesus was the object of his dark intent. We see plenty of evidence that Jesus knew the thoughts and motivations of the twelve. He called some of them out individually. He called the whole group out on a number of occasions. Sometimes the response in times of correction was greater obedience and sometimes not. It is quite likely that Judas knew he didn't measure up in Jesus' eyes.

Maybe Judas disagreed with Jesus' methods. This possibility has been popularized in my lifetime. The premise is that Judas just wanted to get things moving. He thought Jesus would be forced to step up and establish his earthly rule if things got too hot, if his life was threatened, so he just wanted to up the ante so to speak. Everything was going inexorably wrong and maybe he thought of himself as the only one who could make things turn out better.

What we do know is that he took some decisive steps that night. He left the supper when Jesus instructed him to do so. He received his money from the ruling council. He chose to accompany those sent to arrest Jesus. He entered the garden with them. He chose to not just point him out from a distance but to reveal himself to the other disciples and go up face to face to Jesus. Rather than hang back in anonymity, he stepped forward into infamy.

We can never be absolutely sure how these factors influenced the betrayer. What I believe we know is that he was no solitary monster. And the greatest clue we have of this is the response of the eleven earlier during supper when Jesus said, "One of you will betray me." They didn't all turn to Judas and say, "I bet it's you!" Instead they each asked, "Is it me?"

John tells us that Satan was the ultimate source of the problem. He found his man in Judas. It must have been with horror that John and the rest watched the soldiers and council members come into the garden led by Judas. In a heartbeat they would have seen the treachery. It was as plain as day. Betrayal is always a dark business, born in the shadows of one's mind and heart and then carried out in hiddenness. It is significant that John tells us, "It was night".

We find out later two other facts about Judas. He returns the blood money, and he commits suicide. Why? He was still of two minds. He could have been happy in one of two ways. He could have been better and not betrayed Jesus. He could have been worse and had no remorse. One commentator writes, "As it was, he was bad enough to do the deed of infamy, and good enough to be unable to hear the burden of its guilt."

When the story started, Judas stepped into the path of discipleship to live in obedience to Jesus' words and to his way of living. He was positioned to help bring in the kingdom. He was one of the good guys. But, at some point he turned down a path of pride. He allowed himself to step into the plans of Satan, the father of lies, the one who always deceives by saying, "Go ahead, do it your way." "Of course you are mistreated." "Of course you have a right to be angry." "Of course your idea is better." "Of course you have been hurt." "Of course you should do harm to your brother." "Of course, you are fully justified."

A. B. Bruce understands the gospel accounts to teach that Judas approved the good while not always doing good, one whose heart beat for what was noble and holy but also called out to him to take the way of selfishness. There he proved what was uppermost all along. Personal interests superseded all in the end. Judas chose his own way over the way of Jesus.

"Is it me?" all twelve asked. "Is it us?" we must ask ourselves. Is there any place where you play the role of betrayer? Is it in your household, among your friends, in your family, at your workplace, in your school, with your brothers and sisters in Christ? Our betrayal can, like that of Judas, start at the level of attitude. It will show itself in how we think toward another person. It will eventually erupt into words or actions with a shout or a kiss. We can be a tool of Satan in a heartbeat and the harm we bring to Jesus, to the kingdom, to ourselves and others will be utterly devastating.

Some of us are the victims of betrayal. Someone we thought was walking well with us takes a different path for reasons we may never understand any more than we

understand the way of Judas. No matter what contributed to it, this person has betrayed us or soon will. When betrayed, the devastation is incalculable.

The provision of God in the face of betrayal, ours or someone else's is the same. Come clean with God. Stop. Yield to Jesus. He will pick you up, hold you close and take you into the shelter of his loving, merciful, grace-filled embrace. If you are the betrayer, humble yourself and ask to be forgiven. God forgives. "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness." If you are the betrayed, humble yourself and forgive. Jesus forgave. "Forgive them, father, for they don't know what they are doing" was part of his witness from the cross.

Remember where that evening began? It began at the table. So, it ends at the table for us today. The meal began with all of them present. Betrayer. Betrayed. And the rest. Take a moment and pray silently about your own walk with Jesus right now.