

Betrayals

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March 24, 2002

Bible Reading

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over....

Then Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

Jesus replied, “Friend, why are you here?”

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus, and arrested him. One of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it, and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?”... Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. . . .

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.” So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went out and hanged himself. (*Matthew 26:14, 15, 47–54, 56; 27:1–5*)

Sermon

We are all too familiar with the classic example of Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Jesus at the Mount of Olives: how he contracted for thirty pieces of silver with the chief priests to betray Jesus with a kiss. That was a most heinous betrayal, but it wasn’t all. When Jesus was accosted and seized, the disciples, who had lived with him and loved him, all fled in disarray.

During the Passover feast, Jesus had told them that one of their number would betray him. Instead of looking around at each other, each one said, “Lord, is it I?” They found it hard to believe him because

they were so devoted to him. Peter protested that he would never forsake him; that he would willingly die with him. But when the time of testing came, when Jesus was captured, questioned, abused, and ridiculed by the populace, three times Peter denied that he knew him. Too late he realized that he had fulfilled the prophesy, and he wept bitterly.

Judas, it seems, regretted his actions. When Jesus was threatened with death, he went to the chief priests to return the thirty pieces of silver, saying that Jesus was innocent. But the chief priests spurned him. Perhaps Judas believed Jesus would be saved. So many times before, he had quietly disappeared when threatened by crowds. Judas committed suicide in an agony of remorse.

When the question arose as to freeing Jesus or Barabbas, Pilate himself tried to sway the multitude. When they insisted on Barabbas being freed and Jesus crucified, he publicly washed his hands of the decision, declaring that he found Jesus innocent.

At Gethsemane, Jesus asked his disciples to sit while he moved apart to pray. James and John went a short distance with him. He was very sorrowful, and asked them to wait with him and watch. When he was suffering this excruciating moment in the garden, he needed his disciples to be with him while he prayed. He longed for the comfort of their presence, and was pained by their inability to provide this. When he returned to them he found them asleep. Another betrayal. He finally told them all to rest, as the hour of his capture was at hand. When the mob came to arrest him, Jesus didn't need Peter to slice an ear off his enemy. He just needed Peter and the rest to be there with him as he faced his enemies.

When we began our Christian walk, we were imbued with the desire to work on our regeneration in order to do what we could to improve our own little corner of the world. This high-sounding aim, as important as it seemed at the time, inevitably became obscured as the demands of daily living gradually took over. Not that we didn't regret this when we took time to consider what was happening; but somehow the necessities of making a living and raising a family seemed to be of primary importance.

In the rush of busyness we tend to forget the fact that as we struggle to cope with everyday problems, every decision we make has consequences. If we choose well, our character improves; if we choose badly, it degenerates. To quote the Rev. Brian Kingslake:

The matter of making choices is so important that it could almost be said to be the most important thing in life, because by our choices the whole direction of our life is determined, and thus whether we end up in heaven or in hell.

When we are determined to have our own selfish way, we turn our backs on the truth and allow our minds to justify what we wish to do. We mock at the truth, just as the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus on the cross.

If we claim to be Christians while inwardly serving ourselves instead of the Lord, that is another betrayal. We are the only ones who can know for sure if this is happening. A good time to ponder this is just before we take Communion. We need to see and acknowledge our weaknesses. If we don't see them, we can't work on them to get our act together and change them for the better.

It is a great temptation just to "go along with the crowd," especially for teenagers. Witness the fact that many of them are sucked into the use of drugs simply because they want to be accepted by their peers; they don't want to be seen as "different."

I still remember, and regret, something that happened when I was about twelve. We had a lot of kids in our neighborhood who “hung out” together. Some were older—my two sisters among them. There was one unfortunate girl who always had what we called a “snotty nose.” She came to our garden one day, hoping to join in the fun. One of the older girls confronted her and said “We don’t want you, Mary!” and turned her away. Though I felt badly about it, I did and said nothing. A kind of betrayal. Maybe now I can forget about it.... It happened a long time ago!

So many ways of betraying our better self! Things said, things unsaid; actions taken, actions not taken. All result in guilty feelings, for the most part stuffed into our subconscious. These guilty feelings need to be faced and dealt with if we are to move on with our regeneration. Regeneration is not effected in a moment, but from early infancy right to the close of life, and afterwards in the other life to eternity.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as the time when we observe your death approaches, we confess that we have betrayed you in many ways, seeking our own comfort and pleasure instead of your love and wisdom and our neighbor’s happiness. Turn us toward you once again, and put us back on the path of regeneration and spiritual growth. Amen.

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