

Sermon

Maundy Thursday April 17, 2025
2025

It's the beginning of the end. Jesus has been making a name for himself and his popularity is rising. One of the most pivotal things he has done was to raise Lazarus from the dead. This act caused a number of people to follow him, thereby upsetting the Pharisees and other religious leaders. They were concerned that if this Jesus movement grew, the Romans would come in and wipe them all out. Lazarus was also a problem, because he was the living symbol of the power of Jesus. Because of him, even more people were flocking to Jesus. This led the religious leaders to plot to execute both of them.

One of the hallmarks of the Gospel of John is that Jesus is always in control. There are no doubts. There is no crisis of faith. He doesn't ask that this cup be taken away. He doesn't sweat blood. And he chooses the time of his death when he says, "It is finished." This belief of John that Jesus was in the beginning with God, that he was God, and that he was the light shining in the darkness, is also seen tonight when John writes that Jesus knew who was to betray him.

But just because Jesus knew who was to betray him does not mean that Judas was pre-ordained to play that role. Judas, like all of us, had a choice. He could have refused the bribe. He could have chosen to follow the path of Jesus, a path of radical, inclusive love, instead of a path of radicalized and restrictive self-interests. As we read the gospel story, it's clear that the religious leaders are afraid of what Jesus is doing. This fear grows to become a fear of Roman retribution. I think Judas may have been caught up in the fears of the religious leaders: that if Jesus was allowed to continue doing what he was doing, then Rome would come in and destroy everything.

I think we are much the same today. A fear of outsiders, a desire to protect what we have, and a willingness to turn our backs on those not like us will lead to not only a narrow world-view, but will lead us to act in the name of radicalized and restrictive self-interests over the radical love and inclusiveness of Christ. We would rather save what we have than live into Christ's example of sacrificial and inclusive love.

One example of this sacrificial and inclusive love of Christ was by washing the feet of his disciples. As Jesus ate this final meal with his disciples, it's important to

remember that all twelve disciples were present. When Jesus got up to wash the feet of his disciples, he washed the feet of all twelve. He washed the feet of James, John, Andrew, Matthew, Thaddeus, Simon, and the others who would desert him. He washed the feet of Peter who thrice denied him. He washed the feet of Judas who would betray him.

Tonight we share this final meal with Christ. Tonight we are reminded to love each other as Christ loved us. Tonight Judas betrays Christ and hands him over to the authorities.

Tonight we may not be actively betraying Christ, but we are hiding in the shadows for fear that if we speak up we will suffer his same fate. On this night we are busy protecting ourselves. So tonight we watch from the shadows as Jesus is taken away. Tonight we live in fear that if we speak up, we too will be taken away. Tonight Jesus is taken from us, and we silently go our separate ways because it's better that one innocent man be taken away than all of us.

As we meditate on the events of Holy Week, as we come to terms with our complicity in allowing an innocent person to be taken away, let us spend time contemplating, "What if?"

What if we spoke up when the innocent are taken away? What if we lived into sacrificial, inclusive love rather than for our own interests? What if we chose to stand against those who abused their power? What if?