

## ***“John: Love and Betrayal”***

*Romans 5:1-8 • John 13:21-38*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 5, 2023

Before we read our Scripture passage from John this morning, I want you to imagine you are there in that upper room with Jesus and his disciples. Try to picture this dramatic scene. It's getting dark outside. Jesus has just done the unthinkable. He's washed their feet. Now they are all reclining on the floor around low tables with the food on it. Each person is leaning on his left arm so he can eat with his right hand. The back of each one's head is very close to the chest of the person on his left. There's a certain tension in the air and it's made more tense as Jesus begins to say that one of them is not who he's led the rest to believe. In verse 18 Jesus says, "I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'" The Scripture Jesus refers to is Psalm 41, which is about King David being betrayed by his friend and advisor. It's obvious that the conversation is getting very deep and sobering. With that picture in your mind, read John 13:21-38.

Love and betrayal. That's what this passage is all about. Love and betrayal, and it's a story that repeats itself over and over. In Great Britain, today is celebrated as Guy Fawkes day. It's also known as Bonfire Day because they celebrate with fireworks and bonfires. What are they are celebrating? In 1605, a group of English Catholics plotted to blow up the House of Lords on the opening day of Parliament, killing King James I. That's the King James Bible King James. He was a protestant and they were hoping to make England officially Roman Catholic again. The authorities were alerted to search Westminster and on November 5 they found Guy Fawkes guarding 36 barrels of gunpowder hidden under piles of coal, which is why it was called the Gunpowder Plot. Fawkes and the other conspirators were tried and sentenced to death.

History is filled with similar betrayals. On March 15<sup>th</sup>, in 44 BC, Julius Caesar was stabbed to death in the Roman Senate by a group of senators, including his friend Brutus. In his play *Julius Caesar*, William Shakespeare has Caesar say, "et tu brute? You too Brutus?" In 1953, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were tried and executed as spies by the United States for turning over secrets to the Soviet Union, including information on the Manhattan Project, which was the first atomic bombs, and also information on sonar and radar systems.

In that upper room, Jesus was troubled in his spirit. He said, "One of you will betray me." These twelve men had just spent an amazing three years with Jesus. They were together all the time. They had all been there when Jesus fed thousands with only a couple of tiny fish and a few small loaves of bread. They had watched Jesus calm a storm and walk on water. They had all been there when Jesus cast out demons and raise Lazarus from the dead. They were closer than family. And now he says that one of them will betray him. They have no idea who it could be. They loved each other.

John is apparently on Jesus' right, which would put his head just in front of Jesus. So Peter gets John's attention and motions for him to ask Jesus who it is. John apparently whispers this to Jesus, who says, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." In the ancient near east, this was considered to be a sign of great honor. Jesus dipped the bread and gave it to Judas who was seated on his left, which was also the position of honor. Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him yet he loved him to the end. Jesus washed the feet of Judas just like he did everyone else. Jesus placed Judas in the seat of honor. And he gave Judas the dipped bread. By taking the bread, Judas was in effect saying, "Thank you, Master, I am yours." As James Montgomery Boice points out, Judas lied. He was playing a role. He had them all

fooled. This makes the betrayal that much worse. Kent Hughes notes that Jesus continued to offer Judas restoration and forgiveness, but Judas rejected Jesus' radical love. The truth is that Judas had been rejecting the love of Jesus all along.

It's important for us to see the way Jesus responds to Judas. Most of us, if we found out that someone close to us was about to betray us, would seek revenge or at least try to protect ourselves. But Jesus did not give in to anger or bitterness. He continued to love Judas and offer him redemption. Jesus shows us what he meant when he said we are to love our enemies and do good to them.

Sadly, Judas was unwilling to accept that love. So Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Even as he is being betrayed, Jesus is still in control of the situation. Verse 30 says, "So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night." Night is a symbol for evil, chaos, and death. That describes Judas' soul. He left the presence of Jesus, God the Son, and went out into eternal darkness. At that point it was too late for Judas. He would be separated from God for all eternity.

While Jesus said that one of them would betray him, it turns out that it would be more than just Judas. Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus says, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." Peter, always the hothead, says, "Why can't I follow you now? I'm brave enough. I'll lay down my life for you." Peter has no idea what he's saying. His mouth is a couple of miles ahead of his brain at this point, which is not unusual for Peter. He's a big, strong fisherman who knows how to take care of himself. He feels like he's got nothing to fear.

I think many of us often feel that way, too. Whether it's physical strength, or intellectual strength, or financial strength, we decide that we can depend on our own strength to take care of ourselves. Let me warn you that if

that's you, you are thinking just like Peter was here. If you feel you are capable of taking care of yourself, you won't feel like you need Jesus.

So Jesus tells Peter, "You think you will lay down your life for me? Ha! The truth is that by the time the rooster crows tomorrow morning you will have *denied* me three times." Peter would have to face the truth about his weakness and his need to be saved by Jesus. One of the things the Covid pandemic did was to bring each of us face to face with our weakness and our need to be saved by Jesus. Kent Hughes reminds us that "Our greatest human strengths (no matter what they are) will *never* be adequate for following Christ." He goes on, "if we suppose we will be able to follow and serve him *because* of our natural gifts, we had better prepare ourselves for a plunge like Peter's."

It seems obvious that John wants us to think about the failures of both Judas and Peter on the last night of Jesus' life. They both betrayed Jesus. But there's a huge difference between them and that difference is that Peter was ultimately restored by Jesus. Rick Phillips says, "When Judas faced the enormity of his heinous sin, he responded not with repentance but with suicide; Peter, instead, mourned, repented, and was restored." You and I should follow Peter's example. When we fail Jesus, and we will, we need to mourn our failure and repent, turning back to Christ. It doesn't matter how many times we fall or how long it's been since we turned back to Him, Jesus is always ready to receive and forgive us.

After Judas had left the supper, Jesus told the other disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." By the way, this is where we get the name Maundy Thursday, the worship service before Easter where we celebrate Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper. The Latin word for commandment is "mandatum," where we get the English word "mandate." Of course this is not a new commandment. In Leviticus 19:18, God says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

What makes this a “new” commandment is that while the command in Leviticus was for the people to love their Jewish neighbors, the people who were most like them, Jesus commands us to love people who are very different from us, including people we find difficult to love. It’s this kind of love that makes true Christian community possible. The other thing that makes this commandment new is that we are not just to love people as we love ourselves, we are now commanded to love other people the way Jesus loved us. As we

heard in our reading from Romans 5, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

In a few moments, as we participate in the Lord’s supper, let’s remember that this radical, sacrificial love for one another is what we are celebrating. As Jesus said, “in the same way I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” May it be so.

*Amen.*