

“ONE OF YOU WILL BETRAY ME”

Mark 14:17-21 | *I Tell You the Truth* | Lent 2015

17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. **18** While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me." **19** They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely not I?" **20** "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. **21** The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

Jesus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Which conversation would you rather have? Would you rather share the news that your sister had a baby, or tell someone that your grandpa has died? Would you rather tell a kid that he made the team, or that he has been cut? Would you rather tell someone that they're getting a big refund on their taxes this year, or that they owe the IRS a pile of money?

I think most of us would rather share good news than bad news. However, tough conversations need to happen. Bad news needs to be shared too. You can't *not* tell someone that grandpa died. You can't *not* tell that kid he didn't make the team. You can't *not* tell someone the truth about his tax return. Tough conversations are unavoidable. They often start out this way: "Have a seat. We need to talk."

This evening we see our Lord Jesus sitting – technically reclining – at the Passover table with his disciples. He's about to have a very difficult conversation with them. It goes like this: "**I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.**"

Put yourself in Jesus' sandals. What would you have said to Judas on that Thursday evening? How would you have acted? Sometimes a friend will betray our confidence. That's upsetting. We may react by giving him the silent treatment or avoiding him or yelling at him. But this "friend," one of Jesus' closest followers wasn't just going to betray his confidence. He was going to betray his life. He was going to hand him over to enemies who hated him and were determined to kill him. How would you react if you knew your friend was working behind the scenes to get you killed? The way Jesus reacts to that very situation is amazing. He doesn't express anger or outrage. With the words "**One of you is going to betray me,**" he expresses deep concern.

This is not the first time Jesus sent a warning to Judas. Previously Jesus had said things like, "**There are some of you who do not believe,**" or "**Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil**" (John 6:64, 70). Nor was Jesus' warning in the Upper Room the last time he would reach out to Judas. Remember his question in the garden, "**Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a**

kiss?” (Luke 22:48)

Jesus didn't see Judas simply as the pawn of Satan who wasn't worth his time and effort. He saw Judas as a precious soul, a soul for whom he was willing to shed his blood, a soul that he persistently called to repentance. Jesus didn't scream at Judas. He didn't berate or belittle him. He gently, patiently, quietly urged him to repent.

Jesus wasn't just concerned about Judas. He was concerned about all those men sitting around the table. **"I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me."** Jesus wanted all of them to sit up and pay attention. He wanted each man to examine his heart. Their response shows that he got what he wanted. **"They were saddened,"** Mark reports. Not just because Jesus was going to be betrayed. Not just because one of them was going to monstrous thing. They were saddened because each one thought: *It could be me.* Jesus' question led them to take their eyes off the meal before them and look into their own hearts. When they saw the sin there, when they remembered their naturally rebellious natures, one by one they asked, **"Surely not I?"** *It's not me is it, Jesus? It sure could be. Please don't let it be me.*

"Surely not I?" Three little words. But they packed a punch. Just think of who was asking that question. These guys walked and talked with Jesus. They spent about three years as his closest friends. They had front-row seats to his sermons. They witnessed his miracles. They saw his glory shine. Yet Jesus' question got them

thinking. *Is it me?* And sadly, for one of them, the answer was Yes. Jesus pleaded for that one to repent. **"The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."** A more serious warning has never been spoken.

Sometimes we hear this account and we think *Judas, how could you?* Perhaps that's not the point. Maybe tonight's I-Tell-You-the-Truth statement is meant to get each of us to ask, "Surely not I, Lord? We know the secrets of our own hearts, don't we? Can you imagine if a thought bubble floating above your head constantly revealed what was going on in your heart? I'm sure Apple and Google are working on it, but thankfully, there is no such thing. But the Lord knows what's going on inside us. He sees how often we fail to practice what we preach. He sees the hypocrisy gene in our DNA. He knows how quick we are to criticize and cut down. He knows how natural it is for us to think of and serve ourselves first.

From our cushy New Testament perspective we know it was Judas who dipped the bread into the bowl. But we ought also to realize that it could just as easily have been our piece of bread. We are capable of the same monstrous betrayal of our Lord. **"I tell you the truth -- one of you will betray me."** That's a grave warning and a loving call to repentance not only for Judas, but for the Twelve and for each one of us.

Do you like to be called to repentance? Do

you enjoy confessing your sins in private devotion or public worship? Do you smile when the preacher says that you are by nature totally depraved? (Do we preachers enjoy telling you that?) Do you like the message that the wages of sin is death? The answer is No every time. And yet, the very message that we don't enjoy hearing blesses us eternally.

Think of it this way. The doctor walks into the exam room with a clipboard in his hand and a frown on his face. He sighs and says, "I'm sorry. I was afraid of this. It's cancer." Your heart stops beating for a moment. You open your mouth but no words come out. Then the doctor smiles and says, "I've got some good news for you. We caught it early and it's very treatable form of cancer. You're going to be OK."

What a relief! But it doesn't compare to the relief that comes when we hear these words: **"I forgive you all our sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** Those are the words that we pastors love speaking, and that we all love hearing. And we get to hear them because of a Savior who loves us.

Lent is a season of repentance. That doesn't mean just confessing sins. That doesn't mean just sorrow. Repentance also involves the joy and certainty of forgiveness in Christ.

How can we be certain that we are forgiven? Not because we've made up for our mistakes, but because Jesus atoned for our sins. Not because we're not really that bad, but because Jesus was really

that good. Not because we've done our best, but because Jesus did his best. We can be certain of forgiveness because Jesus provided the perfect obedience we can never attain by our efforts. We can be certain of forgiveness because Jesus carried our sins to the cross and paid for them all with his holy blood. We can be certain of forgiveness because Jesus' tomb is empty, the guarantee of his victory and ours, now and forever. We can be certain of forgiveness because the God who does not lie tells us in his Word that **the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin** (1 John 1:7).

"Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man!" Those words are not easy to hear, but take note: Only one of the Twelve betrayed Jesus, not twelve of the Twelve. All would later desert him. All were capable of betraying him. But not all received woe. And neither will you. Your Savior was so determined to save you that he lived and died and rose for you. Your Savior is still so concerned about your eternal future that he daily calls you to repentance. In the end this is not a hard conversation. You don't need to sit down for it. No, you can stand and sing with grateful hearts, **"Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me"** (CW 385:1). Amen.

S.D.G.