

“30 Pieces of Silver”

Matthew 26:1-16

20 March, 2005

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, <sup>2</sup>“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

<sup>3</sup>Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, <sup>4</sup>and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. <sup>5</sup>But they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

<sup>6</sup>Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup>a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. <sup>8</sup>But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, “Why this waste? <sup>9</sup>For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.” <sup>10</sup>But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. <sup>11</sup>For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. <sup>12</sup>By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. <sup>13</sup>Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

<sup>14</sup>Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup>and said, “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. <sup>16</sup>And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

Prayer.

“What will you give me if I betray him to you?”

Betrayal is such a wicked attribute. If you've ever been betrayed by a friend, you know what I mean. I learned early in my adult life to be very careful about recommending people for jobs. A college friend, whom I had helped arrange for a summer job, walked away from it two weeks after starting because, his parents later told me, “he missed his Long Island girlfriend.” I felt like a schmuck, and found it painful to face my boss.

In seminary, I stuck my neck out to give a drunk a second chance. He was in the local lock up, having tremors from being sober for 12 hours. He tearfully confessed to me that he was ready to change, to turn his life around. I pulled a few strings, found him a bed in a first class detox facility, vouched for him with the police, and arranged for an ambulance to deliver him to the door. But the next evening I got a call from one of my police buddies - who this intoxicated man had just hit over the head with a beer bottle. Apparently a few hours after he was checked into detox, he checked himself out and went back to the bar. I felt like a fool, and certainly felt responsible that my friend had been assaulted.

A while back, I had some concerns relating to the practices of a pastor in one parish. Because I was going on vacation, I took those concerns to the proper authorities, and was assured that the issue would be dealt with “according to the Book of Discipline.” I came back from vacation to discover that the issue had not been dealt with, and that because he was a part of the “O’ Boy network,” most likely nothing would be done. Confidences had been broken, and I was left feeling like a fool. Within two years, he was gone from parish ministry and I had been reassigned.

“What will you give me if I betray him to you?” Judas asked.

Betrayal hurts. And if you would let me go on long enough, I could leave you with enough “poor old Todd” self-pity stories to make you sick! But this isn't about me. Betrayal happens to everyone. Each of us have been hurt, misused, and left holding the bag. Everyone of us have been made the fool, and it cuts like a hot knife through butter.

But today's message isn't about you, either. It's not about how sorry we should feel for you because of all the people that have done you wrong. Betrayal is taking us to another place, to a whole deeper level, this Palm / Passion Sunday, this start to Holy Week.

Mary walked into the chaplain's office. She suffered from advanced dementia. She had been raised in a Christian household, but when she married 50 years earlier, her husband never approved, and she hadn't returned to church. She sat and focused on a 4 inch bust of Jesus on the desk. She stared with such intensity, the chaplain asked, “Would you like to hold it?” “Yes, yes I would,” she agreed. As she held it, her eyes filled and she began to cry. “Why are you crying,” the chaplain asked. Her response was startling, “He's so Holy, and I'm so unworthy.” (Alzheimer's Care Quarterly – January / March 2005, *Reaching the Living Echo*, by John Lenshyn, Dmin.)

To look at a picture of Jesus, a statue of Christ, or to hold some icon of the Savior – most of us would have an intellectual or rational response. Most of us could quote atonement doctrine or cite creed of how Jesus died for me, what he did for me, how he was the solution to all my pitiful problems. But Mary's response was soulful, unlike anything you or I might say.

Mary recognizes the fact that we are so unworthy. We wallow about how others have hurt and betrayed us, but we conveniently forget just how we betray the one we call “Savior” each and every day.

If we love Jesus so much, then “why does one half of the world live on less than two dollars a day?” That's what David Allen, from Church World Service, asked our Walworth Council of Churches just this past week as we discussed the past history and the future of the

CROP Walk here in Walworth. We are betraying our love for Jesus when our behaviors impoverish others. Jesus looked at the crowd and fed the five thousand with the bread and fish he collected. We look at the same crowd, shake our heads, and turn away. We have the ability to feed the world many times over, yet grain piles spoil on the ground in the mid-west while the world languishes in hunger.

If we are so sincere about following Jesus, just how can we justify our quickness to turn to violence and war for solutions to our problems? The Roman Catholic Church might be able to make the case for a "Just War Theory," but do you really believe Jesus would sign off on such a document? We are a nation that thrives on violence, whose economy is propped up with the production and sale of arms and munitions, who turns a cold heart to returning soldiers who we've convinced to do our dirty work.

We betray Jesus and his dear name - when we swell with moral indignation to the suffering of casualties, the displacement of refugees, and when we make our self-righteous call to close the borders. Jesus turns the other cheek. We turn our back. Jesus loved his enemies. We are ready to draw a line in the sand and fight to the death.

"He's so Holy, and I'm so unworthy," she cried.

Betrayal – you want to talk about betrayal. We make Judas out to be such a fink. But what about us? What about you and me?

- We betray Christ every time we attempt to force our will on our neighbors.
- We betray Christ every time we stand in judgment over and against the beliefs of others.
- We betray Jesus every time we are intolerant of another child of God because of their national origin, faith, gender or orientation.
- We betray the Savior every day we place our needs in front of the needs of others.
- We betray Christ everyday we don't practice good stewardship of the earth and the things God has given to us.
- We betray Christ every time we take the Lord's name in vane.
- We betray Christ every moment we frolic in the refuse pile of sin, vice, and immorality.
- We betray Christ every time we lie, cheat or steal.

Let's face it, dear members of Zion, Judas is no better and no worse than any one of us, especially me.

I don't like preaching about condemnation, betrayal, or hell. I'm much more at home preaching about promise, forgiveness, love and grace. But this is Palm / Passion Sunday ... and it is the start of Holy Week, the darkest week of the year. Jesus is going to be denied by his friend, betrayed by a disciple, and crucified on a cross and left to hang and die.

And together with Judas, we share in that condemnation.

“They paid him thirty pieces of silver.” And Judas “began to look for an opportunity to betray him.” (Matthew 26:15b and 16b)

If it was our call? You and I, we'd send Judas to hell and never let him out. Let him rot with the Hitlers, the Genghis Khans, and all the other despots of this world. If it was up to us, we would join the cry of the mother of Laci Peterson, who screamed eternal condemnation upon Scott Peterson for killing her daughter. If we could only get our way, we'd cleanse the world of all its imperfections, because God should have known better, and we call it “protecting the sanctity of life,” and we would pronounce it “righteous.” If it was our call, we would raise the bar for the entrance into heaven so high that only 144,000 could ever enter and we'd call it biblical.

Thank God it isn't our call!

The scandal of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that he died to take away the sins of the most unworthy, the least worthy, the lowest, most baddest, most vile member of the human race. And if Jesus is able to do it for Judas, who betrayed him once, think of what he can do for you and me.

Jesus Christ is our judge and jury. *The one we betray is the one who will be judging us.*

Let that sink in for a moment.

It's time we step down from our lofty pulpits, get off our self-righteous high horses, and recognize the fact that the one who we betray is the one who will be judging us.

If ever there was a week to fear, it should be holy week. We become the Judas who sells his information for 30 pieces of silver. We are the Peters who stand around the fire warming ourselves, all the while denying Jesus time and time again, simply to save our skins. We are the crowd who turns on Jesus, and, when given the choice, we choose Barabus.

Thank God the decision isn't left up to us, for we would never return to the tomb. Thank God we don't just up and walk away and return home. Thank God the story doesn't come to an end on a Saturday, when we throw in the towel, call it a “learning experience,” and we go back to fishing.

Thank God we don't have the final word.

He is so Holy, and we are so unworthy.

Amen.