

The Pain of Betrayal – The Victory of Christ’s Love

John 13:18-38

Pastor Guy Gray

The Judas Enigma

Enigma: a puzzling or inexplicable occurrence or situation; a person of puzzling or contradictory character; a saying, question, picture, etc., containing a hidden meaning; riddle.

We cannot reflect on the passion, the suffering of Christ, or the meaning of the Cross without coming face to face with Judas. We would rather not go there...but it’s unavoidable. Judas is at the heart of the story: Judas the betrayer, Judas the enigma. Christ chose him, along with the other 11 disciples, after spending a whole night in prayer before His decision. He lived and traveled with Christ every day for three years, hearing all of Christ’s amazing teachings and witnessing all the incredible miracles. He was there in the upper room when Christ washed their feet. Christ washed his feet too. Christ loved Judas and poured out His love upon Judas without reservation. After all of this, Judas betrayed Jesus. It’s incredible. So what are we to make of Judas? Why does God want us to reflect on this grim episode?

Betrayal – Life’s Deepest Hurt?

Have you ever been betrayed? Ever been deeply hurt by someone close...someone you trusted – a friend, teacher, parent, spouse, child, or even a pastor? Chances are high that you have. It’s the human condition in our broken world. Betrayal could be life’s deepest hurt. Certainly it ranks right at the top of the list.

Jesus was betrayed too. This was in fulfillment of scripture. Jesus quotes from Psalm 41:9 (see John 13:18). This is a Psalm of David. David had a lot of people who hated him and a lot of hardship in life. But in verse 9 he says “even my close friend, the one I trusted and shared my bread with has lifted up his heel against me.” This is the deepest pain of all. Not just an enemy but a close and trusted friend.

There are many dimensions to the story of Judas. There are many mysteries too. But one thing is clear. Jesus came into this world to identify completely with our human condition in a broken world, and betrayal is a huge part of the human experience. Do you know what this means? It means that Jesus feels your pain – truly, deeply, fully. We are taught in the Bible that we may come to Jesus as our merciful and compassionate High Priest (Hebrew 4:15-5:2). This is because He knows exactly what we have been through in life in all of its ugliness.

Christ’s Love Triumphs Over Every Evil and Every Hurt

But there is more. Jesus never stopped loving or serving, even though He knew with absolute certainty He was going to be betrayed. Jesus refused to let the pain of betrayal paralyze Him from His mission. This is the amazing truth of the upper room. Jesus washed the feet of His betrayer. The other disciples did not know it was Judas. This was because Jesus never treated him differently than the others; never held back His love. This is a love greater than any evil and deeper than any hurt. The hurt is real. But it is not ultimate. The love of Christ is ultimate.

This is the way of Christ in our broken world. This is the way of the Cross and the resurrection. This is the Gospel word of promise and hope for each of us. We have a choice. We can let the hurt of betrayal bind our hearts and hold us back from reaching out to love and serve others (knowing that some of those we love and serve will certainly betray and hurt us). Or, we can follow the way of Christ’s love and chose to reach out in love anyway. This is an act of extreme faith in God. This is the way of Christ.

Betrayal, Broken Promises, and Christ’s Command to Love One Another

So what about Peter? After the passage about Judas comes the revelation that Peter is going to deny Christ! Read the passage again. Right between the section about Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial Jesus gives the New Commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you!” (John 13:30-38). If there is anything that is certain in this passage it is that we must live out this commandment to love right in the midst of a broken world...a world filled with the pain of betrayal and disappointment in those we love. It makes us want to hold back! And what about our own failures? Jesus is the only one who loves with a perfect love. He knows that we too will fail. We will fail our friends. We will fail our Lord. But He will never fail. He is the only hero of the story. This is His glory and it is our only true and shining hope (John 13:31-32).

So the Gospel teaches us to trust in Jesus. Trust Him to heal the pain of your wounded heart. Trust Him to forgive you for your own failures that have wounded others. Trust Him with your whole heart. Then get up. Start loving and serving in this broken world. Refuse to be paralyzed by the fear of hurts

that will come. And no matter what, keep your eyes on the Cross and the resurrection victory Jesus Christ!

For Further Reflection

This week, continue to meditate on John 13:18-38. The following questions may help you as you pray, reflect and journal.

How is the hurt of betrayal impacting your life today?

Does the knowledge of the betrayal of Christ help you to deal with your own hurt? Why or why not?

Have you fully trusted Jesus Christ to heal you from old wounds?

In what situations or relationships are you withholding Christ-like love? Why?