

**“Betrayed”**

*And they laid hands on him and seized him (Mark 14:46).*

As we continue our Lenten midweek journey, I want you to close your eyes and reflect on something with me: have you ever had a moment when you felt betrayed? Perhaps it was long ago when a classmate shared a secret of yours without your permission? Maybe it was when a workmate took full credit for your idea? Perhaps it was with a relative who took advantage of your kindness and generosity? Sadly, we know well what it feels like to be betrayed. Betrayals are awful and they bring with them difficult suffering.

Now before you open your eyes, let me redirect your reflections with one other question: have you ever felt betrayed by God? Maybe from your own personal suffering that made things feel like God isn't as caring or loving as He claims? Perhaps it's a loved one's ongoing suffering that makes it seem like God isn't as powerful as He claims? Maybe you've experienced suffering caused by the Church that makes it seem like God isn't as sincere and trustworthy as He claims?

Unfortunately, I don't think it's that uncommon for people, yes, even believers, to feel like God has betrayed us. In fact, I'm reminded of the classic Christmas movie, *It's A Wonderful Life*, where the main character, George Bailey, epitomizes this feeling of betrayal from God. Towards the end of the movie, George is praying in desperation. His life is unraveling because his uncle and business partner misplaced a large sum of money. After extensive searching and no luck finding the money, George is at a friend's bar overcome with grief and fear. He prays for help and then shortly after his prayer, he gets punched in the mouth because of another unrelated incident. But in that moment, George feels betrayed because he believes that his busted lip was God's answer to his prayer. Now that wasn't ultimately the answer to his prayer, but George's feelings and understanding in that moment might not be that far from our own on certain days.

If you've not opened your eyes again, please do so. And I'd encourage you now to keep your eyes focused on our next painting highlighting our second station of the cross, Jesus' betrayal. As we ponder this painting and the scene it captures, we can't help but view it with the burdens and pains of betrayals we've felt. Yet, as we consider this artwork, we also need to view it with the reminder that Jesus also knew betrayal as personally as we do. He was betrayed by many people around Him, especially by those closest to Him. And if anyone could ever claim to be betrayed by God, it was Jesus.

When you look at this painting, there are three individuals on the left side that stand out. The person in the middle, draped in red, is Jesus. To His right is Judas, whose blatant stare almost seems to suggest a challenge to Jesus, as if he was saying to Jesus, what are you going to do about this betrayal? Behind Jesus, in green garments, typically is thought to be the disciple, John, whose raised arms and shocked face suggest horror, confusion and maybe even a desire to escape the trouble that is coming upon Jesus.

On the right side of the painting you have the temple guards and another individual holding a lantern. The temple guards' strong, black, metal armor serves as a stark contrast to the soft, pale expression on Jesus' face and from His meek body language. The individual holding the lantern at times has been considered the disciple, Peter, but even more often it's thought to be a self-portrait of the artist himself, Caravaggio.

In this one painting, four betrayals are frozen for all of us to see. There's the clearest with Judas. His defiant deception of Jesus with a friendly kiss takes center stage in this piece. Yet, Judas' betrayal is complemented by the temple guards' arms outstretched towards Jesus on

behalf of the temple's leaders whose jealousy and hatred of Jesus' words and works led them to willingly pay Judas for this opportunity to seize and silence Jesus.

But these betrayals aren't alone. On either side of this central betraying action, stand two individuals whose actions also make them complicit in betraying Jesus. John, on the far left, appears to be pulling away from his connection to Christ. Fear and confusion lead to distancing from Jesus in His time of need. Then, on the far right, the Caravaggio self-portrait reveals an onlooker who'd rather stand back and watch things unfold and steer clear so as not to get caught up in any of Jesus' trouble.

This artwork forces us to consider the numerous ways Jesus was betrayed in just one moment. And even so, it serves as a culmination of the betrayals Jesus endured throughout His earthly ministry. Betrayals from those closest to Jesus – Judas, John, all the disciples, whose misunderstandings and fears isolated Jesus. Betrayal from the “Church” of that time, the temple and its leaders, whose selfish sacrifice of Jesus would also be the deliverance of salvation they mistakenly claimed to already have apart from Jesus. Betrayal from those looking on from a distance, this painting's artist and yes, we should even include ourselves, whose sinful actions also betray Jesus even though our hands don't physically seize Jesus and lead Him away.

Yes, Jesus has experienced the worst of betrayals and He has suffered the most because of them. But, He wouldn't trade these experiences for anything else. He wouldn't change what He has endured for something easier. He embraced and carried all of our betrayals to the cross. And there on the cross, He faced being forsaken by God the Father. He faced the closest thing to being betrayed by God for our sake. He felt the greatest burdens and pains from betrayal possible and every betrayal of every single person of every single generation, including yours and mine, His heart, mind and body absorbed and He took those betrayals to the grave to bury them there forever.

Making full and complete payment for our betrayals and the world's betrayals, Jesus rose. Jesus wasn't abandoned to death and the grave forever and so leaving us in the guilt of our betrayals forever. No, He rose to forgive and restore all of us betrayers back into relationship with Himself. He rose to proclaim to all His people for all time that God is as loving, caring, powerful and faithful as He claims and to remove any fear or doubt that God would ever betray His own. He rose to sustain us with strength and hope in the midst of betrayals we experience still in the life. He rose to place Himself back into the hands of His betrayers so that we might now through His victory seize our salvation and be led by Him to heaven.

Yes, we know betrayal, but so does Jesus and He's not going anywhere. He brings us the fruits of the betrayals He experienced so that we might not be alone in the betrayals we face. He places Himself into our hands so that we might grasp His forgiveness, life and salvation. He embraces us with the waters of Holy Baptism so that we might know we are valued, loved and wanted. He feeds us His Body and Blood so that we might be sustained and strengthened. He surrounds us with His promises so that we might be supported, encouraged and connected until He returns. Praise be to Jesus because he took His experiences of betrayal and turned them into blessings for our benefit. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan