



ARTIFACTS & IDOLS

((Outside))

Outside of the Church Building, in the parking lot, you'll find a table with some items, some artifacts of sorts... but that's really too tame a word for them. Each thing here represents an idol – something that is or was more valuable to the person to whom they belonged... more valuable than Jesus Christ. Each of these items are small, and may seem a little silly at first, but each one represents a moment of conflict with Jesus in the hours leading up to his death.

You'll see a few small jars of a perfumed oil called Nard. Feel free to open the bottles, to smell the fragrance, and even put a drop or two on your hands or wrist if you would like. This is similar to the oil that Mary, one of the followers of Jesus, used to pour on his head, and clothes and feet the weekend before his crucifixion. But Mary's jar was much bigger, and in that day, it was worth close to \$20,000. For a family like hers, this would have been one of her most priceless possessions; possibly something she retained as an inheritance, and maybe even a nest egg for future savings. But next to Jesus, its value paled in comparison. So, in a majestic act of devotion and love, she used the whole bottle to anoint Jesus Messiah. And the other disciples who saw this called it a waste. But when you gain the true treasure of the universe, all other treasures, idols, loves are put in proper perspective. If what Mary did was a waste, then Jesus calls us to "waste" our lives on him, giving him the best, most valuable, most intimate parts of our life.

Another artifact that you see here is a pile of silver coins. Now, these are obviously just nickels, dimes and quarters, worth only a few dollars at most to us. But they represent the 30 pieces of silver that Judas was paid to betray Jesus to the religious leaders at just the right time. Feel free to pick up a few of the coins, and let them fall back onto the table. One of the difficult things that each person must come to terms with, when considering whether or not to follow Jesus... or remembering just what he's forgiven us, is that we recall that we too have betrayed Christ. He remains utterly faithful to us, even when we have been faithless before him. These coins could represent an idol of control – Judas wanting to make sure things went the way he thought they should. Or they could be an idol of self-promotion... as the Jesus ship is going down, Judas is going to get his. These idols cannot stand before Jesus.

Another item you see on the table are long 5-inch thorns. These come from palm trees common in San Diego. And it was a common plant just like this, full of vicious thorns that Roman soldiers fashioned into a make-shift, humiliating crown they forced onto the head of *Jesus, the King of the Jews*. Feel free to pick up the thorns, hold them, and feel their sharp ends. One thorn wouldn't hurt too much... but this is just a glimpse into the many ways that the Roman guards beat, and abused, and tortured, and humiliated Jesus. Once Judas had betrayed Jesus, he was taken into the custody of the religious leaders, who sent him onto Pilate, the Roman Governor.

It was there that Jesus was condemned to death. These thorns can represent the idol of violence and power, which at its root is maybe just a branch growing out of the idol of control. Violence and power are used to belittle others, to get our way by force, and to silence opposition. This idol, too, cannot stand before Jesus.

The next item you see is a rope. It's just a rope, nothing too special about it. But this rope can represent the ties that bound Jesus as he was led from humiliation to humiliation. But it also represents the rope that Judas Isacariot, the betrayer, used to hang himself. You see, when Judas saw that Jesus was sent off to a death sentence, he imploded. In an instant he could see no way forward for himself. This rope doesn't so much represent an idol, as what happens to someone when an idol is destroyed, or lets them down. You see, one way to know if something other than Jesus is an idol in your life is if when you lose it, you are not just sad (which is normal), but you are devastated, undone, and can see no way forward. For some people, this leads to all kinds of physical darkness, harm, even suicide. But this is not what Jesus intends for us. When he is our greatest treasure, and we lose other important things, we will indeed be sad, and broken-hearted, but we will not be absolutely devastated, because we have him, and he is greater and more enduring than all.

Another item you see is a bowl filled with water. After pronouncing Jesus' execution by crucifixion, Pilate made a public display of washing his hands in a bowl of water before the raucous crowd that had gathered to shout Jesus down into the grave. This was Pilate's way of saying, *Hey, this is not my fault. Don't you blame me for this. I happen to think the guy is innocent, but if this is what you really want, then I'll keep the peace and let you have it. But my hands are clean.* But Pilate's hands are not clean. And neither are yours or mine. *Of course* Pilate had a hand in the death of Jesus. But so did you, and so did I. Jesus went to the cross because of sin. And not just sin in general, but your sin and my sin. And yet we often try to absolve ourselves, like the hand-washing governor. The idols of self-protection, self-promotion, blame-shifting, and false-innocence live in that water. Feel free dip your hands in that water, as a symbol of the fact that you too have tried at times to wash your hands of the culpability you have before God. Our lives, too, have shouted "*Crucify Him!*", and then we try to wash our hands.

The final things you see on the table are rocks. A pile of rocks. One of the most concrete ways idols have taken form over the centuries is that they have been carved into little stone gods, or deities, or images that have been worshiped and loved and venerated, apart from worship, love and veneration of Christ. But you know that an idol doesn't need to be stone to claim our personal worship and devotion. An idol is a good thing that we turn into an absolute thing that overturns every other allegiance or value. An idol is something we cannot live without. An idol is a spiritual addiction that leads to terrible evil. One pastor once said that the human heart is an "idol factory." An idol can be anything. An idol is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.

Can you name what one of those idols has been, that Christ freed you from? You can do so by writing its name on the stone. Or can you name an idol that currently has its fingers wrapped around your heart, keeping you from knowing, loving, or trusting Christ? Take a moment to write its name on a stone, and when you return inside to take Communion, we will ask you to lay that idol down at the foot of the cross, where it belongs.