

Lyrics for His Life, Pt. 5

Betrayed!

Psalm 41: 5-9, 55: 12-14,20-21

**First Presbyterian Church
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One of the hardest human experiences is betrayal. From a young age we know the sickening surprise when someone breaks our trust.

- You play all day with a new friend on Saturday. This could be your new best friend. But Monday at school, she runs off with other friends and acts like she doesn't know you.
- You're talking with a friend about which girls you like. Your friend swears he won't tell, so you spill out her name. Next day the news is all over school.
- You work hard on a team project. Could be school. Could be later in life at work. But your partner ends up getting all the credit, and never says a word.
- You discover one afternoon that your work team had to justify to corporate the overall decline in numbers. They threw you under the bus. You got sacrificed.

We've got all kinds of new words for this in relationships:

- You can get *glamboozled*, when you get all ready for a promised date and the person doesn't show.
- You can get *ghosted* when someone stops replying to texts, won't take calls and can't be found. You're left cut off without explanation.
- You can get *tinmanned*, when someone only pretends to have feelings for you. Like the tin man in *Wizard of Oz*, she really doesn't have a heart. Finding out that you were just being used stabs deep.

We can feel betrayed when a *spouse* gets sick and dies on us, way too soon. We can feel betrayed by our own *bodies* when suddenly, it seems, we can't do what we used to do. We can be betrayed by our *minds* when we can no longer put a name to a face, or even remember what happened yesterday. In all of these cases, and a thousand other ways, betrayal makes us feel that the rug has been pulled out from underneath us. Trust has been broken. We are left cut off. We are embarrassed and ashamed. We are lonely. Thankfully, we have a savior who understands. Jesus knew what it was to be betrayed by a close, long-time friend. Jesus experienced the gut-wrenching realization that someone he loved was, by his actions declaring, "I don't want you anymore. Maybe I never loved you anyway."



One of the most dramatic depictions of Jesus' betrayal is Caravaggio's 1602 painting, "The Taking of Christ." Soldiers surround Jesus. One disciple—could it be Peter—stands back to back with Jesus, trying to hold back the guards. But Judas has rushed right up to Jesus. He kisses his master on the cheek, a usual greeting of a student to his rabbi. That was the sign. "The one I kiss is the man." So soldiers surge forward. Judas still has his arm on

Christ's shoulder. A soldier's armored hand reaches over Judas to grasp Jesus. Our Lord offers no resistance. His hands are clasped before him, awaiting being bound. Judas stares right at Jesus, brazen in his treacherous greeting. Jesus looks down. Pain and sadness sink his face. Does he pray for his betrayer? Has he just whispered, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Lk. 22: 47). In all the rush of energy Caravaggio paints, he also captures the sorrowful stillness of Jesus who knows his love, his mission, has come to this. Betrayed by an intimate friend. The soldiers, of course, aren't needed. The Lord goes willingly.

We know that Jesus predicted this moment shortly before in the Upper Room. But that pronouncement indicates that earlier Jesus had thought about Judas. He had noticed the signs, being aware of the change in him. Perhaps Jesus had prayed through this sickening moment with his Father. Think how our psalms today would have related to him.

And when one comes to see me,
he utters empty words,
while his heart gathers iniquity;
when he goes out, he tells it abroad.

For hours, perhaps for days, Judas had been pretending. Saying all the usual forms of respect and affection. But the heart of Judas was as the psalm says, "gathering iniquity." He was getting used to the idea of what he would do. At some point, Judas crossed the line. He went to the chief priests and made a deal for 30 pieces of silver.

Jesus as he prayed during holy week would have keenly felt the hatred of the religious authorities. How helpful would more words from Psalm 41 have been:

All who hate me whisper together about me;
they imagine the worst for me.
They say, “A deadly thing is poured out on him;
he will not rise again from where he lies.”

Jesus knew they whispered together in secret, away from the crowds. They made their plan and exulted to think that Jesus would finally be got rid of. Dispensed with in death. We don't miss the irony in these lines. “He will not rise again from where he lies.” Oh yes he will, but not until after he has passed through death and hell.

Perhaps Jesus pondered in prayer before his Father just how this betrayal would be enacted. The next verses in Psalm 41 seems so poignant:

Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

Jesus and Judas had been eating bread together for three years. They had the close fellowship of being companions on the road and sharing meals. But on that final night, in the Upper Room, Jesus knew the time had come. “One of you will betray me,” he told his disciples, shocking and grieving them. He told them that a particular Scripture must be fulfilled. These very lines from Psalm 41! “He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.” Soon after, Jesus dipped bread into the wine, and passed it to Judas. “What you are going to do, do quickly.” Judas immediately went out. John's gospel then adds eerily, “And it was night” (Jn, 13:30).

Yes, Jesus knew it was going to happen. But that doesn't mean he could just toss it off like no big deal. The gospels tell us that Jesus was “troubled in spirit” (Jn. 13: 21). It sickened him just the way betrayal nauseates us. Knowing it was coming meant Judas' actions did not surprise Jesus. But that knowing did not shield him from the sorrow. He had to endure it from the moment he figured out what Judas intended. Perhaps we can imagine how Jesus could have poured his feelings through Psalm 55:

For it is not an enemy who taunts me—
then I could bear it;
it is not an adversary
who deals insolently with me—
then I could hide from him.

But it is you, a man, my equal,
my companion, my familiar friend.
We used to take sweet counsel together;
within God's house we walked in the throng. (Ps. 55: 12-14).

Enemies are enemies. But Judas was a “companion,” a “familiar friend.” The sorrow of betrayal and treachery magnifies when we can recall happier times with someone. And magnifies even more if our relationship involved the worship of the LORD. Once, our hearts synced up about what matters most in the universe. And now you, who prayed with me; you, who lifted up your voice in harmony with mine to praise God; you, you have schemed to destroy me. You’ve broken my heart even before your plan will ruin my life.

Jesus knew this pain, and he is our companion who does not leave us when we have been betrayed. I can imagine that, just like us, Jesus had to have an internal conversation with Judas as he prepared to see his betrayal enacted.

Oh Judas! You saw me exhausted after a day of healing. I let show to you the pain on my face when others rejected my message. You smelled the heat of anger on me when the self-righteous bound up the little ones in laws. You sat with us as we weighed decisions about where to go next. You heard me pray to the Father. When, when and why, did you quietly close an inner chamber to love for me?

Oh Judas! Bread multiplied in your very hands as you passed out the miraculous loaves and fishes. You thrilled to the words, “I am the bread of life.” We were so close I could dip your bread for you. I gave you all of me as we shared bread on the last night.

Oh Judas! When Mary anointed my head with that extravagant oil, you snapped. You moralized that its value could have been given to the poor. But your soul was jealous. You felt envy. The decision finalized. I can hear your heart speaking to me, “It’s over. I don’t know you anymore. We’re done. There is another to whom I will go. This is not what I signed up for.”

Oh Judas! You did not come to me with your conflict. You didn’t cry out against the devil’s temptation. You played your part willingly, and invited him in. You looked me in the face and pretended you were with us right up to the end. You

even made me command you, “What you are going to do, do quickly” (Jn. 13: 27).

This event sweeps us up into its emotions. We can relate to Judas. We know that we have hurt others, ghosted friends, cheated on loves. We know we have betrayed our Lord, and might well have done what Judas did. That gives us great honesty about life and great humility. It’s then we can receive the love Jesus gave even to his betrayer. For he washed the feet of Judas that fateful night. He called him “Friend.” He gave him the bread and wine. He never stopped loving Judas even though he knew all.

At the very same time, we realize that Jesus understands fully our experiences of betrayals great and small. He knows the pain more deeply than anyone has ever felt. He relates to us in betrayal. But we can also relate to him. We can draw on the times we have been betrayed to connect to Jesus. To tell him we know a bit about what he was feeling. We can sorrow with him. We can tell him we would like to stay with him when others desert him. We share a bond of emotions with Jesus in his betrayal. But we don’t only use that bond for our comfort. We use it to offer Jesus devotion. To offer him love. To yearn to give him some care, some relief, some hope.

So for the final time this Lent, let us go to him in prayer. Let’s be there with Jesus in the upper room, and speak to him about this hour.

I’m so sorry, Jesus, you had to feel
The worst of what we do to each other.
I hurt to know you had to hear the terrible clang
Of heart-doors closing against you.

To be stunned as if a death struck the family circle
And then to realize “You are dead to me”
Is what Judas, what we, said to you
As we handed you over to enemies.
You, Jesus, who had ever been true.

I’m so sorry that in Judas, I turned on you,
“You never really knew me,”
I said to the one who touched and tended my wounds.
“You’re not who I thought you were,”
I said to one whose steadfast love endures forever.

“I’d rather have another,”

I said to the only one whose loyalty is unto death.

I am here now, trying to keep watch with you,

Fearful of my own recurring faithlessness.

I know something of what you felt

And I am sorry I caused it.