

Maundy Thursday YA 2023

Betrayal and the Hour of Glory
By the Rev. Salying Wong

Jesus loved Judas Iscariot. He loved Judas' moral clarity, his commitment and conviction, and his heart for the poor. He loved him and was pained by how Judas set himself apart from the others, maybe except for Peter. They were both zealots. But Judas was "Ish Kriyot" (Iscariot), meaning man of Kriyot, a village near the Judean border, far from Galilee, far from the other eleven. So, even though Judas and Peter had similar political-religious convictions, Judas didn't completely identify with Peter. Judas made his difference a point of identity; he made it a point of fervor. Jesus watched Judas along the way—watched how Judas positioned himself as above the others in his love for Israel. Jesus knew that Judas wanted him to be a warrior king, a messiah to defeat the Romans. Judas wanted this so badly, he never really listened when Jesus taught the beatitudes, when Jesus healed the sick. All he saw was a Jesus of power.

On that day, when Jesus told his disciples that he would ride into Jerusalem, Judas was ecstatic! Yes, finally, the moment to launch Jesus' military campaign. But when Jesus passed over the white stallion and chose instead a donkey, Judas stared at him with incredulity. And suddenly, Judas' eyes were opened. Jesus was not the man he thought he was. The disappointment turned quickly to hatred. The hatred ran thick, like poison coursing through his veins. Jesus had betrayed him! The door to his heart slammed shut and it hardened into a hammer.

Judas continued to go through the motions, but already he was on a path of bitterness. He saw how Jesus looked at him in those last days, and he hated Jesus even more for the sadness in his eyes. Judas made a plan. He would turn Jesus over to the chief priests and they would try him for blasphemy. God knew how easy that would be, since every chance he got, Jesus challenged the interpretation of the law of the religious elites. The arrogance. Jesus could have helped himself, but instead he kept saying bunkum like, "Trust in God." The only trust he had in God, Judas thought, was for freedom for Israel.

On a Thursday, when the general Jewish population was preparing for the Passover, Jesus told his disciples he wanted to have supper with them. They did not know it was his last one with them.

They had prepared for the Passover by cleaning at the ritual baths nearby. When they entered the upper room, they only had to wash their feet because they were already clean. They expected the house slave to come with a basin of water. They were utterly shocked when Jesus removed his outer garment and tied a towel around his waist and poured water in a feet-washing basin and came to wash their feet. The world had turned upside down. Their

master was a slave to them. What could this mean? Peter did not like it! He protested, as he protested when Jesus predicted that he would be crucified. “No. Uh-uh. You will not wash my feet!” Then Jesus said, “Unless I wash you, you have no part in me.” Peter then said, “Wash my whole body then!” But Jesus said, “Peter, this is not about getting clean. This is about my love for you. I, your master, am emptying myself for you.” Then turning to all, “Do you know what I’ve done for you? I have abased myself as a slave to you. I who can command all power in the universe have chosen the complete opposite—powerlessness—for you.”

Judas was affronted and disgusted. He was dizzy with anger. This is the craziest thing Jesus had done so far! My God, this night couldn’t end any faster.

Then Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment. I want you to love one another as I have loved you. I want you to be as self-giving in love for one another. You have heard, Love your neighbor as yourself. But, I say, Love one another more than yourself. You will see that this love that I give you includes giving my life for you. I’ve set you an example; I want you to do this. When you wash one another’s feet, this is what I want it to mean.”

Judas couldn’t help it. He smirked a dark and bitter smirk. He would never give his life for these yokels. He would only give his life for victory over his enemies!. Jesus met his eyes and Judas stared back, defiant. Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you mad at me?” And Judas shrugged and said, “I’m mad at the whole world!”

In the midst of the supper, Jesus started crying. He cried out, “My heart is breaking. I am so sad. I’ve never been this sad.” They all looked at him, confused. He said to them, “One of you will betray me.” They all looked at each other, each wondering if Jesus had seen into their doubting hearts. For each and every one of them had their doubts since the donkey ride into Jerusalem. It had gotten dangerous. None of them were sure they signed up for this. Because he was afraid to hear it from Jesus in case he was the one, Peter tapped the Beloved Disciple and said, “Ask him who it is?” Peter said a silent prayer, “God, please don’t let it be me.”

Judas was sitting next to the Beloved Disciple, and Jesus handed him a piece of bread. Jesus took a deep breath and said, “At least do it quickly!” Judas looked at the bread, wavered for a moment, but gritted his teeth. Leaving the bread on the table, he got up quickly and left the upper room.

And night descended. It descended and descended. Like rain, the darkness fell in sheets of black silk, so that even the stars were obliterated.

Which was harder? Judas' betrayal or the cross? Jesus loved Judas. He poured his love into Judas the same way he poured his love to the others. But Judas rejected it. Judas had other plans. The greater the love you give, the greater the hope you have, the greater the pain when the love is rejected and the hope is annihilated.

So the hour of glory begins. Why glory? How could this be glory? Jesus would say again and again in the Gospel of John, "For this I came." For this. Not just crucifixion. Not just resurrection and ascension. But also to be betrayed. Betrayal is a suffering all its own; exquisite in the way it pierces through the heart, rather than the wrists and feet. Judas had become a hammer and he drove a nail through Jesus' heart.

Betrayal hits the most vulnerable part of us, even more vulnerable than the part of us that fears death. On this night Jesus emptied himself in the act of feet washing so to touch this most tender and fragile part of us. "For this I came," Jesus said. Jesus came to walk with all the betrayed, so those willing would follow him out of the darkness of despair and into the light of grace. Glory, yes, so that the old life can be laid to rest. Grace, yes, and not a script of our own writing. Grace, giving up control of how life turns out and resurrection meaning a new life, with unimagined possibilities, and now imagined into existence. Now is the hour of glory. It begins.