

Maundy Thursday

The Battle Is Personal

Sermon Text: Luke 22:47,48

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

We can lock our doors to keep out thieves and robbers. We can carry mace when we job in order to ward off attackers. But more often than not, we find that our worst attack is one that is personal. When someone close to us, who should love us, who should care for us, who should want our good, but for selfish reasons they hurt us. The high school friend asks out the person that they knew you were interested in. The spouse hides money from their partner. The son or daughter refuses to talk to the parent because they disagree on faith. The worst battles are the personal ones.

On this Maundy Thursday, we are inclined to reflect on more than the events of the Lord's Supper. Much happened that night--the night Jesus was betrayed. For us, for the disciples, and especially for Jesus, the battle that Maundy Thursday night, was personal.

It was personal for those disciples. Set yourself in their shoes. They had just had their last meal together in that upper room. Jesus had instituted his meal. They sang a hymn of praise, as this was also a celebration of the Passover, a time to remember God's deliverance. They had gone out to the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. There, Jesus prayed. When he finished, he returned to his disciples, who had fallen asleep. Jesus woke them, and "while he was still speaking, a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'" (Luke 22:47, 48).

Perhaps to some, it looked as if Judas was greeting his great friend Jesus. But the soldiers knew. Jesus knew. Judas knew was this kiss really meant.

Can you imagine though how painful that moment was not only for Jesus, but also the disciples? I presume all of them would have called Judas their friend at one point. He was trusted enough to take care of the money, even though it was discovered that he was skimming off the top. How hurt those disciples were to see this betrayal. Yes, this battle was personal for the disciples.

It was also personal for Judas. It's obvious that Judas experienced a huge struggle inside him. He tried to deny it, even to Jesus' face, saying, "Surely, not I." But when Jesus said, "Yes, it is you," Judas fled in shame. But Satan had a grip on his heart and he went through with it still, committing the worst sin that has ever been committed and this by someone who called himself a disciple of Jesus.

The battle was personal for Judas. It was personal for the rest of the disciples too. It's personal for us, because we face the same struggle.

Judas wasn't the only disciple of Jesus to turn his back on his Savior that night. All of them fled from Jesus. Yes, Peter took out his sword and valiantly and foolishly tried to protect Jesus, but he too ran and left Jesus alone. In the dark, those 11 ran from Jesus and left him alone among the

wolves. And all of this happened, mere hours after Jesus gave them his body and blood to eat and drink.

I think about my own life in this. Do you? I ask myself, "How long does it take me to turn back to sin after a worship service?" I can't help but think of what Jesus said, in Matthew 26:41, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Yes, the flesh is weak. It makes me feel dirty and unworthy of Jesus when I consider how quickly after taking the Lord's Supper, there I am right back in sin. Maybe you have improper thoughts about a coworker or a classmate. Maybe you have been getting spiritually lazy. Perhaps on some Sundays, the temptation becomes, "Well it's not a normal church service anymore, so it's not really worship anymore. Maybe you said to yourself since our whole shelter in place started, that you would bump up your personal Bible study time or your prayer time. How long did that last? How quickly we flee Jesus.

But the Son of God goes forth to war. He is our hero.

You know, one of the things that convinces me about the validity of Scripture is how it portrays those who wrote it down. We have a saying in English, "History is written by the victors." And this is seen in countless cultures. The winners are the ones who get to write down the histories. And they always seem to portray themselves through rose-tinted glasses.

Now, Luke wasn't there. But he did talk to those who were. They did tell him the events of that night. Did they paint for the gospel writer, a particularly rosy picture of themselves? No. They were afraid. They were cowardly. They ran. I think those men weren't afraid to be seen this way by others or by future Christians because they knew that they were not the heroes of this story who bravely stood by their Savior. There is only one hero of this story. Jesus.

He is the hero who loves us every day of our lives. The betrayed and abandoned Jesus never betrayed nor abandoned us. Alone he faced that physical abuse. Alone he shouldered the burden of all sin. Alone he went before God's judgment and faced the full condemnation of hell in our place. Alone, he earned full and free forgiveness for every sinner.

Why? Because for him the battle is personal. Each and everyone of those disciples, Jesus dearly loved. Take a look at how Jesus got down on his knees that night in the upper room and washed his disciples feet. Take a look at how he gave them his very body and blood. Take a look at how Jesus prayed for them and for us in the Garden of Gethsemane some time. Or take a look at how later Jesus would reinstate Peter in such a way as to assure him that the Son of God still loved him. Or if you want the ultimate proof, consider that even after the disciples abandoned him, Jesus still went to the cross because of them and because of us. The battle was personal for Jesus because he loves each and every one of us personally.

I wish tonight, we would be together so that we can taste and see that personal love of Christ in the sacrament. But even though we can't tonight, even though we are separated from each other and our church home, we are not separated from the personal love of our Savior.

When our past sins haunt us, or we feel like we are losing in our struggle against sin, or we feel guilty in the realizing of spiritual laziness or apathy, remember that this is the battle that Jesus already won for each of us. He has fought that battle on our behalf and won. He gives us the forgiveness of those sins and promises us life and salvation. The battle against Satan every day is personal, but so is the love of Jesus.

After that meal, Jesus and his disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus prayed. He prayed a lot for his disciples. I encourage you tonight to take a page out of your Savior's playbook. Say some prayers of thanks to God. But say some prayers also for one another, just like Jesus did. Express to God your personal concerns for your small group Bible study, for your family members, for those who are alone in their homes right now, for those you know well and those you don't.

The battle is personal. Satan will tempt each of Christ's disciples. The battle is personal. The Savior has conquered every of his disciples' sins. The battle is personal, but that does not mean we fight it alone. Amen.

God bless you, God keep you safe. God keep you healthy. God keep you firmly rooted in his gospel. Amen.