

"BETRAYAL IS NEVER CONVENIENT"

TEXT: "And Judas sought how he might conveniently
betray Him". (Mark 14: 11)

INTRODUCTION In the 11th verse of the 14th chapter of Mark's Gospel, we read these ominous words: "And Judas sought how he might conveniently betray Him".

Today is Passion Sunday in the Christian year. A day so designated to encourage us to reflect on the sufferings of our Lord. And one of the major perpetrators of His suffering was the disciple, Judas Iscariot.

As you know, Judas is the villain in the story. By his traitorous conduct, he permanently stained an otherwise noble name. Dante consigned Judas to the lowest of all hells - a hell of ice and cold. And this because the sin of Judas was not born in the heat of passion, but out of a cold and calculating rejection of the Son of God.

His deed is made the more repulsive in Mark's Gospel where it is set side by side with the beautiful story of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus with some very costly ointment. (pause.)

DEVELOPMENT Let us temper our judgment of Judas by noting that providence thrust him into a major role in history's best known and most puzzling drama. It was not the lot of Judas to remain "down on the farm" - untested and unknown. Rather, he came "up to the city"...involved deeply in life.

Remember Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard". That poem was written as the author looked out over the church burial grounds at Stoke Poges, a site not far from London. It struck him that those people who had lived and died in obscurity were spared being drawn to their full potential - for either good or evil. He wrote,

"Their lot forbad: nor circumscrib'd alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;
Forbad to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind.

For from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way".

Isn't it true that in some cases human nature looks better than in others because it can go through life without being subjected to the same test. In our own American society, with its many devices for absorbing shocks, it is possible for many to go from birth to death without discovering whether they are essentially of cowardly or heroic mold.

"One of you will betray me" said Jesus to the disciples in the Upper Room. All were sufficiently in touch with their own weaknesses to ask, each one in turn, "Lord....is it I?"

"Lord...is it I?"

BACK TO THE BIBLE

But back to the Bible and the text for today: "And Judas sought how he might conveniently betray Him". Judas had already sensed that there was a market for Jesus. The price had been set - 30 pieces of silver, the going price for a slave. It only remained for him to find a "convenient" way to hand Him over. Now that word "convenient" in the Greek is rooted in the word "kairos" which means special or opportune time. Judas was looking for the right moment to earn his money and turn Jesus over.

This deed, of course, had to be performed "off camera" - that is, away from the masses, the surging multitudes who had come to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. It also should be done before those crowds would leave following the Passover. The situation called for speed and daring.

And so his darkened mind hatched the scheme that would be enacted. The site was to be Gethsemane, a garden outside the city wall. The time was to be at night. The sign was to be a kiss. And it was so. Judas had sought to "conveniently" betray his master and he had. The multitudes did not know that anything was going on. No violence was required. He had earned his bounty.

But the tragic story of Judas does not end in Gethsemane's garden. It goes on....to overflow in shame and remorse. On to that piercing cry, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood". On to flinging the thirty pieces of silver to the Temple floor. On to a self-inflicted-hanging...a burial in potter's field.

JUDAS AND JESUS

Judas had sought the impossible. There is no "convenient" way or time to dispose of Jesus. I believe that when we betray Him we betray ourselves - for He is man as man was meant to be! Not for nothing did He use the title - Son of Man. All things betray those who betray Him - sooner or later.

For Jesus is more than a wayside prophet of another day. He cannot be dealt with in a few chapters in a book dealing with World Religions and then conveniently dismissed. He is the LIGHT of the world. This is not our claim, but His. Jesus is not an "elective" offered in life, but a required presence - an indispensable truth, and woven into the fabric of history in such a way that in destroying Him, we only destroy ourselves.

Jesus did not come to deliver helpful hints on gracious living. He never said "please". He came to save us from ourselves - our sin, our selfishness, and to lift us up to our full potential. Even George Bernard Shaw, never a part of the believing community, was driven to say in Androcles and the Lion:

"I am not a Christian any more than Pilate was - yet, after an experience of many years, I can see no solution for the world's problems other than that which would have been supplied by Jesus Christ if He had addressed himself to the work of a practical statesman"

Friends, we are not done with Jesus when we lay bare the flaws of the Church and burlesque her inadequacies. We are not done with Jesus when we expose the indiscretions of an Elmer Gantry evangelist, the alcoholism of a parish priest, the frailties of an errant pastor, the calculating self-interest of an ecclesiastical bureaucrat, or the hypocrisy or apathy of those who sit in the pews of a Church. He will not go away with that. We are stuck with Jesus. We have Him on our hands. Not for Judas, nor for us, is it possible to conveniently

betray Him!

A COMPANION TRUTH

There is a "companion" truth here that must not go unstated.

It is never convenient to receive Jesus either, and here I would call to witness Felix, the Procurator of Judea under the Emperor Claudius. Paul, the Apostle, was a prisoner of the Empire. Summoned before Felix, Paul delivered a ringing testimony to the power and the adequacy of Christ. The reaction of Felix is given to us in these words:

"Go thy way for this time. When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee".

Alas....there is no record in the Scriptures that Felix or his wife, Drusilla, who had heard Paul, too, ever opened their hearts and their impoverished lives to the riches of the mercy of God revealed in Christ.

We never find room for Jesus; we must make room for Him! We never find time for Jesus; we must make time for Him. He will not be fitted in between the cracks of our private ambitions, nor is He some kind of celestial caboose that can be coupled to the train of our preoccupations at our personal pleasure. He will not accomodate Himself to our debased values and our counterfeit kind of living. He comes into our lives representing change and interruption.

Let's give Felix a measure of credit. At least he knew he could not have Jesus and his present way of life. He chose to stay with what he had. To the best of our knowledge, he never found his convenient season to receive Jesus.

OUR NATION

It troubles me that most of us go our way assuming that our nation is a Christian nation, that we have received Jesus and all He represents. ~~Like~~ Like Mary and Joseph who took their 12 year old to the Temple and started to return without Him, we assume in this land of ours that He is with us when He may not be with us at all. Is He with us? Have we received Him?

To Love Or To Perish is a book recently edited by several people including a clergy friend of many years, Edward Carothers. I was struck by one of its penetrating passages and share it with you:

"How could pockets of starvation exist in America if 100 million Christians really heard Jesus say, 'I was hungry and you fed me?' Or, how could racism continue if 100 million Christians lived the faith of the Jesus who took as the hero of one of his most moving parables a member of a hated ethnic group - a Samaritan? How could people suffer and die of curable diseases if the consciences of 100 million Christians burned with the words of Jesus, 'I was sick and you visited me?' How could opportunities for liberation and reconciliation go by...wastedif every morning 100 million Christians recalled Jesus' words, 'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly'".

Could it be that we have assimilated Christ rather than receive Him? At the personal level the point is just as true. Something must go when Jesus moves in. We cannot have Him and hang on to our cherished hatreds, our biases, our little wants - our greed, lust, and selfishness.

I remember once reading that one reason why Judas betrayed Jesus was because

Jesus would not commit Himself to the kind of narrow fanatical nationalism that meant so much to Judas. And Judas discovered that he could not have Jesus on his terms. Jesus comes into our lives on His terms or not at all.

I believe that many who come within the reach of the pulpits of this city and country do not intend to stave off Christ forever. Like Felix there in the New Testament, they have it in the back of their minds that some day when the urgent momentary problems have let up they will find some time or room for Him. In our youth, we plead that we must first have our fling. Then that we must first get an education. Then that we must first get a job and make a start up the ladder. Then that we must raise a family. Then that we must move toward social acceptance and financial security - and then that...and then...and then. one day it's all over....

The point is that it never is convenient for any of us to receive Him. When He comes it is to repossess us....to shut us down and then to open us up under new management.

CLOSING "And Judas sought how he might conveniently betray Him". Felix trembled and answered, "Go thy way for this time....when I have a convenient season I will call for thee".

As one of the youngsters in our Sunday School said to his teacher recently, "Jesus.....is the part of God we see". And that's about it, isn't it. In Him we discover the nature of God and discern as nowhere else His claims upon our lives. Jesus - in a way - represents that "otherness" that keeps moving in on us. He will not be destroyed by us. He will not be assimilated by us. He is there to evoke a decision from us, each of us. And perhaps in the quietness of this sanctuary today, in this service, He is calling to someone present....to receive Him now.....to make that decision.

I close with these lines; they're anonymous, but they speak for me the burden of this message on Passion Sunday. Entitled, "Still Thou Art Question". Hear them,

"We place Thy sacred name upon our brows;
Our cycles from Thy natal day we score:
Yet, spite of all our sons and all our vows,
We thirst and ever thirst to know Thee more.

For Thou art Mystery and Question still;
Even when we see Thee lifted as a sign
Drawing all men unto that hapless hill
With the resistless power of Love Divine.

Still Thou Art Question - while rings in our ears
Thine outcry to a world discord-beset:
Have I been with thee all these many years,
O world - dost thou not know Me even yet?"

PRAYER Grant, o God, that our Lord's passion may find us warm and open, sensitive and responsive. Bless us with the gift of a penitent spirit, that we may rightly perceive our need and begin to understand the mystery of the cross. Help us to remain loyal to the highest and the best we have known - in Him, and in whose name we pray. Amen loyal to Him, for in Him we see the highest and the best that mankind has ever known. Amen

"BETRAYAL IS NEVER CONVENIENT"

INTRODUCTION

In the 11th verse of the 14th chapter of Mark's Gospel we read some rather ominous words, "And Judas sought how he might conveniently betray Him".

Today is the Fifth Sunday in Lent, a Sunday often referred to as Passion Sunday...a day so designated to encourage us to reflect on the sufferings of our Lord. And one of the major perpetrators of His suffering was the disciple, Judas Iscariot.

As you know, Judas is the villain in the greatest story ever told. By his traitorous conduct, he permanently stained an otherwise noble name. Dante consigned Judas to the lowest of all hells - a hell of ice and cold. And this because the sin of Judas was not born in the heat of passion, but out of a cold and calculating rejection of the Son of God.

His deed is made the more repulsive in Mark's Gospel where it is set side by side with the beautiful story of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus with some costly ointment.

DEVELOPMENT

Let us temper our judgment of Judas by pointing out that Providence thrust him into a major role in history's best known and most puzzling drama. It was not the lot of Judas to remain, as we say, "down on the farm" - untested, unknown. Rather, he came up "to the city" where he became involved in the issues of life confronting his people.

Remember Gray's "Elegy Written In a Country Church Yard"? That poem was written as the author looked out over the church burial grounds at Stoke Poges, a site not far from London. It struck him that those many people who had lived and died in obscurity were spared being drawn to their full potential - for either good or evil. And so he wrote:

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Isn't it true that in some cases human nature looks better than in others because it can go through life without being subjected to the same test. In our own society, with its many devices for absorbing shocks, it's entirely possible for many to go from birth to death without really discovering whether they are essentially of cowardly or heroic mold. Let our judgment of Judas be tempered...

"One of you will betray me" said Jesus to the disciples that night in Jerusalem's upper room. All were sufficiently in touch with their own weaknesses to ask, each one in turn..."Lord...is it I?"

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JUDAS AND JESUS

Judas was seeking the impossible, for in a very real sense there is no convenient way or time to dispose of Jesus. I believe that when we betray Him we betray ourselves - for He is man as man was meant to be. Not for nothing did He use the title - the Son of Man. All things betray those who betray Him - sooner or later. We need to remember that...write it in our hearts.

For Jesus is more than a wayside prophet of another day. He cannot be dealt with in a few chapters in a book dealing with the World's Great Religions and then conveniently dismissed. He is the Light of our World. This is not our claim, but His. Jesus is not an "elective" offered in life, but a required Presense...an indispensable truth, and woven into the fabric of history in such a way that in destroying Him, we only destroy ourselves.

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We never find room for Jesus. We must make room for Him. We never find time for Jesus. We must make time for Him. He will not be fitted in between the cracks of our private ambitions, nor is He some kind of celestial caboose that can be coupled to the train of our preoccupations at our personal pleasure. He will not accomodate Himself to our debased values and our counterfeit kind of living. He comes into our lives representing change and interruption.

Let's give Felix a measure of credit. At least he knew he could not have Jesus and his present way of life. He chose to stay with what he had. To the best of our knowledge, he never found his convenient season to receive Jesus. What about ourselves? There never really is a convenient season for any of us to receive Him.

I believe that many who come within the reach of the pulpits of this city and country to not intend to stave off Christ forever. Like Felix there in the New Testament, they have it in the back of their minds that some day when the urgent momentary problems have let up they will find some time or room for Him. In our youth, we plead that we must first have our fling. Then that we must first get an education. Then that we must first get a job and make a start up the ladder. Then that we must raise a family. Then that we must move toward social acceptance and financial security - and then...and then...and then one day it's all over. There never seems to be a convenient time to receive Him.

CLOSING "And Judas sought how he might conveniently betray Him". And Felix trembled and answered, ~~"Go thy way for this time...when I have a convenient time I will call for thee"~~.

As one of the boys in our Sunday School said to his teacher recently, "Jesus....is that part of God that we see". And that's about it, isn't it? In Him we discover the nature of God and discern as nowhere else His claims upon our lives. Jesus, in a way, represents that "otherness" that keeps moving in on us. He will not be destroyed by us. He will not be assimilated by us. He is there to evoke a decision from us. And perhaps in the quietness of this sanctuary today, and in this service on Passion Sunday, He is calling to someone present...to receive Him now, to make that decision for Him.

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Our cycles from thy natal day we score;
Yet - spite of all our sons and all our vows,
We thirst and ever thirst to know Thee more!

For Thou art Mystery and Question still;
Even when we see Thee lifted as a sign
Drawing all men unto that hapless Hill
With the resistless power of Love Divine!

Still Thou art Question - while rings in our ears
Thine outcry to a world discord-beset:
Have I been with thee all these many years,
O World - dost thou not know Me even yet...?"

PRAYER Grant, O God and Father of us all, that our Lord's Passion may find us warm and open....sensitive and responsive. Bless us with the gift of a penitent spirit, that we may rightly perceive our need and begin to understand more fully the deep mystery of the Cross.

Help us to remain loyal to Him, for in Him we see the highest and the best that mankind has ever known.

Our prayers this day reach out to include the President of our land, and his wife and their loved ones and his advisors, especially the Vice President of our country. Grateful we are that Thou hast seen fit to bring him safely through this week marked by violence. Our prayers, O Father, also reach out to those who serve with him daily and who risk their lives for his safety. Heal those who have been hurt . For miracles of healing, we give thee thanks.

Our prayers also include the family of him who was the perpetrator of this act of violence. May they feel your presence in a way they have never known it before.

All this in the spirit of Christ who suffered for us all.