

We are continuing in our Lent sermon series today, looking at the gospel of Matthew—chapters 26-27—and seeking to dive a little deeper into the passion, the endurance, the suffering, of Jesus as we make our way through this Lent season and journeying towards Easter.

Last week I mentioned that from the moment that Jesus steps foot in the garden of Gethsemane, something's different. The mood changes. The drumbeats are going. The disciples know that there's something different about Jesus.

Because from this moment on, Jesus isn't so much focused anymore on helping his disciples and others to understand who He is—to grasp who He is and what He's doing, what He's come to do.

Jesus' whole focus is now on the cup that He must drink. The cup that cannot be received by anyone else. The cup that He must drink alone.

Because the weight of the world can ultimately only fall on *and be redeemed* by one Person. Only the painter knows what the damaged painting was originally supposed to look like. Only the Creator can provide the healing necessary for the world that He has created.

And so Jesus—despite His best efforts to plead for another way—Jesus willingly submits to the will of the Father and takes the cup.

And from the moment that He does, immediately after He prays His last 'Thy will be done' prayer, the weight of the world—the evil and brokenness and pain that has damaged and deranged His good creation—that weight is walking right towards Him.

Read Matthew 26:47-56.

You know the phrase, 'when it rains, it pours'? It's a colloquial phrase in the English language—a saying that we often use when things just keep getting worse. One bad thing happens and you say, "Oh, that sucks." Another thing happens and you go, "Jeepers, this is really hard."

And then a third thing happens and you almost laugh because of the absurdity of it—like, "Can I catch a break please?" When it rains, it pours. When things get bad, sometimes they stay at that level, but sometimes it just gets worse and worse.

That's the sense we get when we read these verses. We have to be prepared for the downpour. Because the pain and heartache and suffering isn't just going to rain on Jesus once or twice, or for a brief period of time. It's just going to keep getting worse—and we have to prepare our hearts for it.

We talked last week about trembling when we come to these passages; and that feels more and more appropriate.

Verse 47: *“While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.”*

While He was still speaking. He’s literally mid-sentence, in the middle of saying to his disciples, “Get up! Wake up! You need to see this, because here comes my betrayer.”

And who is that betrayer? The text makes it very clear. It’s one of the twelve. One of the twelve men who Jesus specifically chose out of *everyone* to follow Him for three years—hearing all of His teaching, witnessing most of His miracles, having one-on-one conversations about life, death, and everything in between.

One of the twelve who the Father revealed to Jesus after He had prayed all night asking the Father for direction.

This man wasn’t just anybody (for example, a bystander who didn’t personally care for Jesus’ preaching). He was a friend. And although we have evidence that Jesus knew what was going on Judas’ heart—based on how he responded to him at the Last Supper—the other disciples could very well have had no idea.

Imagine how they must have felt in this moment. The surprise on their faces when Judas, *one of them*, comes walking up with a crowd holding swords and clubs.

And to bring them to a very sacred place—this mountainside where Jesus had routinely brought His disciples, a place where miracles had been performed, a place where they shared many moments of teaching, laughter, joy, grief. A place that probably felt very personal to them.

Of all the places, Judas brings them *here*. To the garden. On this sacred mountain.

Imagine the shock, and then the hatred that they must have felt in that moment. The disciples have no idea what Jesus is about to endure—but the first glimpse of it, which would have been horrifying to them, is a result of one of their own betraying Jesus.

One of their own, who approaches Jesus and *dares* to come up to Him, call Him Rabbi (“Teacher”), as if nothing’s wrong, and then plants a kiss on his face—a familial signal of affection, respect, of goodwill. Almost as if Judas is completely unaware of what He is doing.

As one writer put it, “Judas twists a greeting of friendship... into a death sign.” Which is reminiscent—or perhaps even fulfills—the words of Psalm 55:

“My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant.

*His talk is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart;
his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords.”*

[There are few things that are more hurtful in life than the betrayal of a friend; and it is a profound mystery that our God is a God who understands this.]

I mean, the *hatred* that the other eleven disciples must have felt in that moment. How could you? What are you *doing*? Do you have any idea what you’ve done?

But then imagine the look on their faces when Jesus says to Judas, “*Do what you came for, friend.*”

Now, I don’t want the drama of this moment to get lost in Greek exegesis, but this is one of those moments when I feel it’s necessary to mention that the NIV translation—as much as I love it—unhelpfully changes the order of the words.

Because in the Greek, the word ‘friend’ actually comes first. It’s the very first word that comes out of Jesus’ mouth. And in my mind, that is absolutely essential.

What does Jesus do when one of His chosen twelve apostles comes to this very sacred place with swords and clubs in an act of betrayal and *dares* to call Him Rabbi and offer a kiss as if nothing is wrong? He’s a liar, a traitor, and a thief. He’s turned against Jesus.

Now, it’s very possible that Judas wasn’t always like this. Like all of us, he’s a complex human being that shouldn’t be boxed in. But the fact still remains that by this point in the story, Judas has literally chosen evil. It’s like he’s got the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil staring him right in the face, and he chooses the wrong tree.

And *you would think* that the consequence of such a tragic decision, that such an evil gesture, would result in the weight of the world’s evil and suffering falling on *him*. Right? That seems appropriate. Judas is the bad guy. Judas turned Him in. Judas embodied the evil that had been raging through humanity ever since the beginning when humans chose to be their own judges of good and evil.

Judas is literally choosing in this moment to *know* evil over and above *knowing* His Lord. To be the judge of what happens here.

And yet, Jesus calls him ‘friend.’ Judas was offered friendship with God until the very end. The first—and last—word that comes out of Jesus’ mouth towards Judas is one of love.

And I’m convinced that only Jesus in this moment could have done that. That Jesus is the only God who has ever done that.

We have to see this moment, here in these verses, as a revelatory moment. We *have* to grasp this incredibly preposterous thing that Jesus did.

Because you and I? We don't have it in us. Even the most holy of us do not have it *in us* to do what Jesus did here with Judas. It's not that it's not *possible*—but we don't have it *in us*.

Let me give you an example of what I mean.

Corrie Ten Boom—some of you may know the name—was a Dutch woman living in Holland during WWII. She and her family were some of courageous individuals who had committed to hiding Jews in their home.

And when she was caught, she was of course sent to a concentration camp where she was stripped of her dignity, saw her father and her sister (Betsie) die, and suffered more than most of us could imagine.

But she recounts in one of her memoirs of a moment when she was speaking at a church service in Munich and saw, in the crowd, the former S.S. soldier—a member of the Nazi party elite—who had stood guard at the shower door in the processing center at Ravensbruck.

He was apparently the first actual soldier that Corrie had seen since that time that she was in the camp. And she writes this, painting the picture of this moment:

“Suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie’s pain-blanching face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. ‘How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein.’ He said. ‘To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!’

“His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. (Now, this is the moment where we naturally want to applaud her. ‘Well done! Don’t shake his hand; he’s a horrible human being. He should know what he’s done.’) But then she says this:

“Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me (fairly enough), I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more?

“Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. (And here’s where it gets interesting. Listen to what she says.) I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. *I could not*. I felt *nothing*, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity.

“And so again I breathed a silent prayer. ‘Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me *your* forgiveness.’

She reached out her hand. “[And] as I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

“And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on his. When he tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along *with* the command, *the love itself*.”

Do you understand what she’s saying there? It wasn’t *her* love that she gave him.

Think again about this scene in the garden. In no way were the disciples prepared to love their enemy in this moment. They were too dumb struck by who their enemy turned out to be.

And they respond in precisely the way that we would expect them to. That we would expect *our own selves* to respond if we were watching a loved one being possibly led to their death. We wouldn’t perhaps pull out a sword, but we’d certainly have our own forms of cutting an ear off.

My older brother recently told me that he and his three daughters were walking down a crosswalk, across a street, recently, and a driver turning left—clearly not paying attention—drove within a couple metres of my youngest niece.

And my brother, who’s not known to yell or get angry very quickly, admitted to me that he screamed bloody murder at the guy. Words came out of his mouth that hadn’t been uttered before. Totally out of instinct. The life if your beloved daughter flashes before your eyes, and the reaction is entirely instinctive. Raw, human reaction. You almost can’t control it.

This is maybe similar to what happens here with the eleven disciples. They’re being reactive.

But before we start thinking that they were more loyal than Judas, look again at what happens here. As soon as Jesus makes it clear to them that violence is not the answer and reasserts that He’s in control of this situation—despite appearances—the disciples are at a loss for what to do.

Because remember, they had promised to stand beside Jesus no matter what. “*Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you,*” said Peter. And all the rest of them said the same.

Jesus knew it would happen. Back in verse 31, “*Jesus told them, ‘This very night you will all fall away on account of me.’*” He knew it would happen. But it stings nonetheless.

And by the end of this passage, they’ve all fled and deserted Him. Because they don’t have any other rubric for how to react. They don’t have it *in* them to respond differently. Their natural impulse was either to fight or flee. We all would have done the same were we in their shoes.

And it makes me wonder if in this passage, there's a sense in which Jesus is saying to all of us, "Put down your swords."

In other words, "Put down your own natural reactions; your own self-righteous way of responding to hurtful scenarios. Stop focusing on what others have done and instead focus on what I am doing. *Behold* what I am doing. *Look at* what I am doing."

Think back to Corrie Ten Boom's story. What did she discover? That the love required of her to follow Jesus' command in loving her enemy—someone who had seriously harmed her and traumatized her—she discovered that that love wasn't something she needed to have or create herself. She did not have to make herself love him.

She needed to *obey* and let Christ's love be created within her. To let Christ put the love *in* her.

The big question of the day then is: do we trust that that's even possible? That God can actually *give us* the love that we need? Do we believe that that's even possible?

I sure hope so. Because the sting of betrayal is strong. It's not like a bee sting which you feel for a couple hours and then it goes away.

The sting of betrayal—the sting of being harmed by a fellow human being, especially someone close to you—lingers sometimes indefinitely. That doesn't just pass with time. Like any kind of trauma, it rears its ugly head in unexpected places. All of a sudden you find yourself talking about it years late with your spouse or a friend, and you think, "Wait, I thought I was over this."

You don't just forgive and forget. Jesus certainly never forgot Judas, or the sting of betrayal from all twelve of His disciples. Still today in glory, Jesus carries the wounds in His hands and feet—and that includes the wounds from this moment in Gethsemane.

Yet Jesus was able to offer Judas love till the very end. He didn't try to prevent Judas from doing what he did because He knew that the evil that the enemy intended to accomplish through Judas would be turned around and used for good. He knew that all things were in the Father's hands.

And so when we stand in the shadow of the cross of Christ, and in the love that flowed from the Father while we were yet sinners, how can we but do the same? When we've been insulted, had words spoken behind our backs, had our reputations hurt—to remember Jesus, who in this moment with Judas, was about to face an *entire night* of insults, torture, mocking, spitting, and shaming?

When we know that Christ died *even for the individual who hurt Him*, can we not pray for the same Spirit that was with Jesus to also be with us?

Because if that Spirit can raise Jesus from the dead, then certainly He can give us the strength to extend a hand of love to our enemies—knowing that they too are carrying their own wounds.

As the saying goes, hurt people hurt people. We all know what it feels like to be hurt. We all have the capacity to do great harm. And it is only by God's grace that *don't* harm as much as we could.

What Jesus reveals to us in His suffering—in this moment of trial—is that out of our suffering can be produced great love. It's an incredibly bewildering paradox: that it's when you've been hurt that you can—by the power of the Holy Spirit within you—produce the greatest love.

But it's why Jesus said in John 15, "*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*" In other words, *my* love is what you need to follow this command. *My* love is what transforms you.

My love is what enables you to love even your enemy.