

John 13:21-30 *After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me." ²² His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. ²³ One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴ Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." ²⁵ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." ²⁸ But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹ Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. ³⁰ As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.*

The Hands of Betrayal

1. Jesus strengthened the disciples' faith
2. Jesus warned Judas
3. Jesus was fulfilling his mission

What does it take to be a traitor? Consider the story of Benedict Arnold. The fact is that Benedict Arnold was actually a very gifted fighter for the American Army during the Revolutionary War. Yet Arnold has gone down in history not as a hero but as a villain, a military traitor who decided to hand over a key fort in West Point, New York to the British. When he didn't get the promotions that he wanted and the money that he was seeking for his lavish life, he decided to hand over the fort for more money. With cool calculation he promised to deliver West Point and its 3,000 defenders for 20,000 sterling (about \$1 million today), hoping that he could stop the Americans in their tracks. Persuading Washington to place the fort under his command, Arnold moved in September 1780 to execute his audacious plan, only to see it fail.

King David of Israel knew a thing about betrayal. Ahithophel was a member of David's cabinet. He was a close friend and trusted confidant, a man who dined at David's family table, a man whose counsel David trusted, whose advice was blessed by God and who contributed to the outward success of David's kingdom. Yet when David's son Absalom attempted a coup, Ahithophel betrayed David and joined Absalom's cause. For David, that betrayal must have been particularly biting. Although it's unclear whether he was talking about Ahithophel, David lamented his betrayal in the prophetic psalm, "Even my close friend, someone I trusted, who shared my bread, has turned against me" (Ps 41:9).

Is there anything more biting than betrayal? When we're close with someone, when we share our deepest secrets and trust him or her completely, and then he or she betrays that trust, that is intensely painful. Betrayal burns with the intensity of the sun; it scalds the soul.

David certainly wasn't the first person to have been betrayed, and he wasn't the last either. Judas was close with Jesus. Like Ahithophel, Judas was part of the inner circle, one of the Twelve. He was a trusted friend who broke bread at Jesus' table. And like him, Judas had lifted up his hands in betrayal.

Jesus knew this would happen. He told his disciples, "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He." (John 13:19) After the fact, the disciples would then remember that Jesus predicted that Judas would do this. Only God would know Psalm 41 was a prediction of what would happen to him. And so, the disciples would then afterward conclude that Jesus must be the Christ - the Chosen One. At this time of betrayal Jesus was concerned with the disciples' faith. And so, he used this word of prediction to strengthen their faith in Jesus as their Savior.

Part of strengthening their faith was having them face their own sinfulness. *After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me." ²² His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant.* When you sidle up to your seat at the Thanksgiving table, there is an understanding that you check your baggage at the door. Husbands and wives don't throw barbs at one another, at least not there. The kids are banned from snark and fighting. You're expected to be civil; it's a celebration after all! But here is Jesus celebrating with thanksgiving God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery with his disciples for last time. His accusation brings instant tension to the room.

There is more in the disciples' words than defensiveness and denial. Jesus hadn't identified the betrayer by name. He said, "*One of you will betray me*" (v. 21), and that sent the disciples' minds spinning into introspection. "Is he talking about me? Could he be talking about me? I know he's God; he knows everything and can see my soul. He sees

something in one of our hearts that nobody else sees. What does he see in my heart? Am I capable of *this*?" They realized the same thing that Paul declared, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." (Romans 7:18) When Paul realized this about himself, he said to other Christians in 1 Corinthians, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

What secret sins do you have hiding in your heart? Have you ever sold God out for money? Have your secret sins gone unrepented and unchecked for so long that they eat away at your faith and corrode your soul? Is greed the sin that is crouching at your door? What is the secret sin that you fight to hide from everyone else, but the devil waves it in front of your face like a flag because he knows it brings you to your knees? Ask yourself honestly, because this devotion will do you no good if all you take away is that Judas was a bad guy. Nobody wakes up in the morning determined to fail God—but we better know that we are all sinners, and sinners sin. Anyone is capable of any sin, especially if left unchecked and unaddressed. What does the all-knowing Jesus see when he looks in your heart?

Not only was Jesus concerned about the faith of his disciples, he also was warning Judas. This is the third time in John's gospel that Jesus has been described as being *troubled in spirit*. He was troubled at the grave of Lazarus and he was troubled as he faced the prospect of the hour when he would suffer the penalty for the world's sins. Now, he is troubled at the thought of one of his followers betraying him. He is distressed over the spiritual condition, conduct and destiny of one of his own. How easy it would have been for our Lord to reveal the identity of his betrayer, or at least to expose him as a thief. I can imagine that Peter would have happily used his sword on Judas, if he had known what would happen in the next few hours. But Jesus remains silent, determined to die and determined to warn Judas.

The love of money was a terrible temptation for Judas, and the devil knew it. Satan was determined to wave that sin in Judas' face like a flag. When you've already sold out to dipping your dirty hands into the disciples' petty cash to use as your personal piggy bank, it's a pretty easy sell for the devil to suggest, "And what exactly would you be willing to do for 30 pieces of silver?" Judas didn't predetermine his betrayal; he didn't flip a switch. Garden variety greed, unrepented and unchecked, was the sin that corroded his soul over time, and eventually put Judas' betraying hands at the table.

Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. What an incredible, defining, moment this was! Jesus and Judas must have locked eyes. Judas had to have known that Jesus knew everything. Jesus knew Judas was the betrayer. He knew Judas did not really believe in him. He knew Judas had already reached an agreement with the chief priests. He knew that Judas would soon go to the Jewish authorities, and lead them to him, to arrest him. In spite of all this, Judas reached out and took the bread, knowing what that meant. It forever sealed his doom.

Nothing scares me more than Judas. Judas scares me because of me. If Judas can do this, so can I! I have a Benedict Arnold and Judas within in me and he wants nothing else than to take over my heart, my life, my eternity. And it's so easy to let him do so. That's why we must continue to be confronted with our sin and the consequences of sin. May we all be able to see the darkness of our own souls and cling to Jesus for light and life.

As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night. It was night in the soul of Judas. It was night when evil reigns. It was night when the Light of the world was to be snuffed out in death. Judas went ahead with his betrayal by identifying Jesus with a kiss. Jesus went ahead down a path that led to another "betrayal" even more surreal.

Jesus went to the cross, where in painful anguish he called out to a faithful friend who had abandoned him. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). God treated Christ as though he had committed Judas' betrayal. God banished Christ to suffer hell's punishment for our sins of greed, for our idolatrous love of money, for our obtuse self-righteousness, and for every embarrassing secret sin we insist on hiding. They've been punished in full, and they've been paid in full. And as Isaiah says, "By his wounds we are healed" (53:5).

The hands of betrayal started Jesus on the path to the cross. But in this we see that God *doesn't* betray sinners; instead, he turned his back on his own Son. He forsook Christ! He reconciled the world! He will never betray you, not now in the struggles of this life or on the last day. "God made him who had not sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)