

The First Week of Lent • March 4, 2009
St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA
Rev. Braun Campbell
Matthew 26:20-25

"The Wound of Betrayal"

Trust is a wonderful thing. It allows us to develop deeper bonds with those around us, to build strong connections. It means that we can share ourselves, that we don't have to be on-guard all the time. Trust is a wonderful thing. But trust takes time to build – months or years, in some instances. As relationships grow, people allow for a measure of trust, confidence that the other will live up to their word or guard the confidence that's been shared with them. If you really trust someone, what might you expect of them? That they keep your secrets? That they protect your interests and well-being? That they've got your back? Trust is a wonderful thing.

So what, then, is betrayal? How might you react if your long-time business partner left you in the cold so that they could turn a bigger profit? How would you feel if your best friend gossiped about you? What would it be like to learn that your spouse had cheated on you? In the context of trust, betrayal is a violation. And what do we call someone who sells out their country by giving up state secrets to other nations? "Traitor." This is someone who has taken advantage of the trust that has been shared with them, using that trust their own advantage – this is the betrayer. Such people are among the most despised in history and literature. In Dante's epic poem *The Inferno*, the lowest place in Hell is reserved for the traitors. There, Dante suggests, we would find Brutus and Cassius, who conspired against Julius Caesar, and Judas, who betrayed Jesus into the hands of those who would put him to death. It's safe to say that we lose very little love on traitors: how many people do you know that would want to name their baby "Judas?"

Judas had been one of Jesus' closest disciples for three years. They had traveled together, worked together, shared meals together – including this last meal in our reading from Matthew. But Judas betrays Jesus. **The wound of betrayal does not come from the hand of someone distant from and unknown to Jesus: it is dealt him by one of his closest friends.**

Judas isn't alone. You and I right there with him. Jesus has called us "friend," but we have betrayed him. We have sold him out to pursue what seems pleasing in this world. You and I, the friends of Jesus, handed him over to be crucified. **We are the betrayers;** therefore, we really should ponder that wound of betrayal this day. Judas became so wracked with guilt over what he'd done that he considered himself beyond God's mercy and forgiveness.

But the wound of betrayal didn't change Jesus' love for his friends – it didn't for Judas and it doesn't for us. Jesus spoke in sorrow when he proclaimed that it would have been better for the traitor to have never been born. Jesus saw the path that his friend had chosen and knew that it would lead to great pain for the both of them. Even so, Jesus went to the cross out of love for Judas, out of love for you and for me. Jesus remembered his friends – remembered us even though we betrayed him – and on Good Friday, he took that wound of betrayal to the cross to make things right with God **for us.**

When someone betrays your trust, when someone close strikes you with the wound of betrayal, it hurts. And in response to that hurt, our nature in sin rises up to strike back, to get revenge, to hate. But we are not slaves to that desire. We can take that inclination to hate and to hurt and we can nail it to the cross, because Jesus has called us his friends. He has set us free from sin. As we move through this time of Lent, think on what it would mean for you to keep on showing love those who have betrayed you – even if they haven't asked for forgiveness. You might not think it possible to love those who have betrayed you, but know that the love of Jesus is at work to make that possible. Remember Jesus and the self-giving love that he has shown you. Remember how he has welcomed you back into his close company. Remember that Jesus calls you "friend."

Amen.