

### Call to Worship

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Tonight you will all fall away because of me. This is because it is written, *I will hit the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will go off in all directions.* But after I'm raised up, I'll go before you to Galilee." **Like Peter, we replied, "If everyone else stumbles because of you, I'll never stumble."**

Jesus said to him, "I assure you that, before the rooster crows tonight, you will deny me three times." **And we like Peter say, "Even if I must die alongside you, I won't deny you." All the disciples said the same thing.** Come, let us explore where we live in denial of Christ.

### Prayer of Invocation

Lord Jesus, you came riding into Jerusalem in the midst the praises of the crowd, to discover all too soon how earful and how fickle disciples really can be. **By coming to share our humanity, you learned the struggles of the human heart, and the sins that plague our ordinary lives.**

Without your love and forgiveness, we would be overcome by shame and sorrow. But you have saved us from our unfaithfulness with a love beyond measure. **Lord, Open us to all that you would have us be, for you and for others. 'Breakthrough' into our lives and our church with new possibilities. Amen.**

### The Word Matthew 26:36, 40-43, 47-49, 69-75

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. He said to the disciples, "Stay here while I go and pray over there." **He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you stay alert one hour with me? Stay alert and pray so that you won't give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak."**

A second time he went away and prayed, "My Father, if it's not possible that this cup be taken away unless I drink it, then let it be what you want." **Again he came and found them sleeping. Their eyes were heavy with sleep.**

While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came. With him was a large crowd carrying swords and clubs. They had been sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. **His betrayer had given them a sign: "Arrest the man I kiss." Just then he came to Jesus and said, "Hello, Rabbi." Then he kissed him.**

Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant woman came and said to him, "You were also with Jesus the Galilean." **But he denied it in front of all of them, saying, "I don't know what you are talking about."**

When he went over to the gate, another woman saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." **With a solemn pledge, he denied it again, saying, "I don't know the man."**

A short time later those standing there came and said to Peter, "You must be one of them. The way you talk gives you away." **Then he cursed and swore, "I don't know the man!" At that very moment the rooster crows. Peter remembered Jesus' words, "Before the rooster crows you will deny me three times." And Peter went out and cried uncontrollably.**

### Living the Word

*Ah, holy Jesus, how have you offended? Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon you? Alas, my disloyalty, Jesus, has undone you! It was I, Lord Jesus, it was I who denied you; I crucified you.*

Each of us has an inner chamber. It is in that part of us that we only allow a few precious people that we have chosen to share. It is the sanctuary of our hearts, that place where we expose our souls intimately. When we share this sacred space with others, we form a special bond of friendship with them.

During Biblical times, the heart carried a rich collective meaning. It was considered to be the center of all physical and spiritual life. It was the soul and the settling place of all thoughts. It held ones passions and desires, also ones tastes and ones intentions. The heart contained the will, human character and intelligence. During his earthly ministry, Jesus invited the disciples to share an intimate 'heart' relationship with him.

On the timeline of the scriptures, the pieces we are looking at this morning would have happened after Jesus and the disciples had been together for about three years. They had lived together and shared their hopes and fears with one another. Under the discerning eye of the Lord, these men had allowed their inner most beings to be exposed to the light of Jesus the Christ. They had shared their 'hearts' with one another. If you have ever connected with a person at this level of trust, you can imagine how devastating it is to lose that intimacy through betrayal.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus and the disciples found themselves standing on opposite sides of betrayal. In our lifetime, we, too may live both sides between playing the role of the betrayer and the betrayed. When intimate dating relationships break up, when married couples divorce, when companies slash jobs or our private matters become public gossip – we experience the sting of betrayal.

What hope does scripture offer to sustain us through such terrible seasons of life? How can we endure and overcome betrayal? What promising example does Jesus provide? Our journey this morning is to move beyond betrayal.

When betrayals happen, there usually are a number of casualties. Matthew 26 highlights this somber truth. With only a quick glance at the scene in the garden of Gethsemane we might be led to believe that there were only two primary people involved in the betrayal of Jesus: Judas, the betrayer and Jesus, the one betrayed. The rest of the sleepy disciples seem to be just confused bystanders. But if we look deeper into the situation we can see a much larger set of participants in the betrayal of Jesus.

We will begin with Judas and move through the list. According to the book of John, Jesus had known for some time that Judas would betray him. Early in Jesus ministry on earth, Jesus exposed a dishonest streak in the character of Judas. Judas had become a thief, using his position as the disciple's treasurer to skim funds from the collections for the poor. Looking at the bigger picture, these petty thefts could have been seen as a signal to the slide of Judas' soul into the hands of evil. By the time the Last Supper took place, Judas had actually become an agent, with others, working for evil.

Increasingly, evil penetrated the heart of Judas. His initial flirtation with petty theft roused his appetite for more. He came to know sin. The Greek word for know, means to understand something by having intimate experience with it. Judas came to know evil, by participating in it repeatedly. By allowing himself such an unrestricted relationship with sin, the soul of Judas became spiritually and morally corrupted.

One definition of betray is 'to be a traitor or to commit disloyalty against.' First and foremost, Judas committed major disloyalty against his own soul. He became a traitor to the Godly purpose set before all of humanity to serve and love the Lord. After betraying himself so completely, it became no difficult task for him to betray Jesus.

The story continues by describing what proved to be Peter's failed pledge of loyalty. Judas was not the only one to betray Jesus that night. The betrayal involved all of the disciples. In the Upper Room Jesus said to them: "*Tonight you will all fall away because of me.*" And they did, but Peter is the next one that the scripture specifically points out.

When Jesus predicted that all would fall away, Peter made a noble promise to stand with Jesus even if everyone else should run away. But after Jesus was arrested and taken away by the authorities, and after all of the disciples had fled, Peter insistently denied – not once, not twice, but three times – even having known Jesus, just as Jesus had predicted he would do.

Peter's promise to stand by Jesus was a promise before the calamity had begun. It was a well intentioned statement of someone who had never had his integrity and physical life challenged by a deadly emergency. Peter had made his promise based on his confidence in his own human willpower. Within his boast he assumed more than he could deliver, because it was made in the heat of passion in the moment. Sometimes we aren't any different with our words...

Peter honestly intended to stand by Jesus through it all, but the unexpected anxiety of the disaster deflated his resolve. Peter's humanity still controlled his core motivations. When given the choice to stand with Christ or to save his own skin, Peter sought to protect himself from harm. Before the rooster crowed, Peter had betrayed his friend and Lord three times.

The demands of being a Christian stretch way beyond what we are capable of being if our will is our own and not in line with God's will. Being a faithful Christian is impossible without the help of Jesus.

What do you do when those closest to you let you down and fail to show you the kind of dependability you expect from them? Where do you turn for help? How do you deal with the sudden twist of emotions? What thoughts and feelings would Jesus have experienced in the garden of Gethsemane as three of his closest disciples participated in a different kind of betrayal from what we have already described?

Let's go back before Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, before Peter denied him three times. Just before those things happened Jesus, anxious and considering everything from the days before and all that was yet to come, went to the garden to get away with the disciples to be alone with God in deep reflection and prayer. Jesus thought that Peter, James and John, more than all of the others would at least keep vigil with him in prayer.

Jesus had offered to these three more spectacular events and inside understandings than the other disciples, such as the Transfiguration and the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead. At those times Jesus' unique divinity had been revealed to them. Peter, James and John shared a authentic bond of intimate trust with the Lord. Now, they alone accompanied Jesus even farther into the seclusion of the garden.

It was there that Jesus admitted to them that his soul was very sad, even unto death, sad. He may have been experiencing internal human apprehension to carry out God's plan, or was he just sad for the events that were unfolding within the work he had done...wherever his heart was, he asked them to watch and pray with him.

They didn't have to have the answers, or fight the soldiers, he just wanted their company in prayer and the crisis was unfolding around them. Even sadder was the fact that the disciples couldn't believe the extent of the crisis happening around them, and so they slept. It must have felt like betrayal of their friendship to Jesus when his closest friends didn't stay awake with him.

This could have been another of the spectacular events as they prayed with him, but they missed the opportunity to hear Jesus call God, 'Abba' as in Dad. To be a part of the pleas for the cup of death to be passed, yet they slept.

Even so, Jesus finished this prayer time resigned to carry out God's will. During our times of betrayal we may find ourselves alone with God. Our only course may be to remain faithful to God's will, trusting that God is going to sustain us through whatever our crisis is.

All through the betrayals and denials, and even the crucifixion, Jesus' integrity remained intact. He did not fall into temptation. In order for us to move beyond betrayal, we need intimate prayer with God, opening our pain-filled soul to the healing that God has for us. God's glory, along with your integrity will grow in you the faith to survive the crisis.

When Jesus finished praying in the garden, Judas, accompanied by the authorities, promptly arrived to deliver to Jesus the kiss of betrayal. Following this the armed soldiers whisked Jesus away from his band of confused and bewildered disciples.

Just reading part of the whole story leaves us with little thoughts of victory. If we stopped reading at this point, it appears all is lost. The great leader of this group of twelve has been humiliated through betrayal by his own disciples. All Jesus has to look forward to is a mock trial and an degrading and excruciating death on a cross between two thieves.

Betrayal is like that, the nightmare seems to continue indefinitely. No help is riding in to save Jesus. No escape is possible. Even so, there is hope in these scriptures if we look beyond the basic details. It may seem like a surprise for some of us, but Jesus doesn't sit passively, hoping for someone else to deliver him from the betrayals. Instead, he actively initiated his personal release.

Victims of betrayal often fall into the trap of consuming waves of bitterness and vengeance, humiliation and self-pity. Though Jesus' human nature must have crying out in pain and humiliation, he pronounced his freedom from the prison of betrayal. While hanging on the cross between two thieves, Jesus gave a statement to be applied to all who had betrayed him: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."

You may be thinking, that is fine for Jesus, but how can I forgive my betrayer? Victims of betrayal are not powerless. They can begin their own freedom! With the Lord's help, anyone can decide without doubt to rise above the imposing temptations of resentment, loathing, and revenge. It is possible to keep your integrity and even excel in the face of betrayal.

It is possible to forgive those who betray you. It is possible to brush aside the desires for bitterness and vengeance. Victims can find the strength to forgive through the grace of God and the unconditional love of Christ. As the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans, "But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us." Betrayers can repent and be 'at-one' again with God and with the Lord's help we can all move beyond betrayal.

Jesus desires an intimate heart relationship with me and with you, just as he did with the disciples. This week I invite you to ask the Lord to help you identify any emotional wounds that you or others may bear from a betrayal in which you were a part. Offer it to God and seek the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to be a part of forgiveness taking place.

*Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay you, I will love you, and will ever pray with you, I will think on your forgiveness and your love unswerving, not my deserving... O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you that where you are in glory, there your servant will be too. And Jesus I have promised to serve you until the end; O give me grace to follow, my master and my friend.*