

April 2, 2021
Good Friday Sermon
All Saints Episcopal Church
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Betrayal: The Sin We Deny

I have always wondered why we call “Good Friday” Good Friday. Since my childhood there is nothing ‘good’ about it. It is a dark day. A very dark day in our liturgical cycle. A time that we remember and reenact the last horrific hours of Jesus’ life and agonizing death. A time of great sorrow because the dawn of Easter has not yet shown its light.

Another thing that I think is missing in our understanding of Good Friday is what led up to this remembering? What makes this remembrance so memorable? What was the tipping point?

We focus heavily on Jesus’s passion and death but it seems we lose the focus on what was really His final undoing. His betrayal!

All four Gospels focus on the betrayal identified by Jesus during the sharing of the Passover meal with his disciples. Each gospel has a little different take depending on the writer’s perspective but it is still there. Whether Jesus predicted his future or even participated in it to fulfill prophecy we can only wonder and have what is written to go on.

Betrayal is considered to be at the heart of every traumatic human experience. Betrayal can happen in the public and private arena but most damaging is the betrayals between our most trusted of human relationships.

Judas, according to Elaine Pagels and Karen King’s book “Reading Judas; The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity”, was quoted as Jesus’s closest and most trusted confidant— the one to whom Jesus reveals his deepest mysteries and whom he trusts to initiate the passion.

As one of the twelve disciples, Judas has been portrayed for centuries as the evil one. The bad guy motivated by greed and power to undermine his beloved friend and teacher. Was he really part of Jesus's plan to be the fall guy in getting his beloved friend and teacher executed?

According to Elaine Pagel, yes.

The Gospel of Judas, discovered in the 1970's in Middle Egypt, was refuted to be heretical by Irenaeus around 180 C.E. because this Gospel reveals a much different account of Judas's role in Jesus's Passion Narrative.

Regardless, whether Judas was the bad guy or the fall guy, we are presented with the most destructive form of human pain that can be inflicted upon each other.

This grave sin of betrayal that we hear in our Holy Week Gospel readings is what Jesus wants us to know about. So, the focus should not be on Judas but on the act of betrayal.

What makes betrayal so grave is that it kills relationships. It takes away your sense of trust and compassion for the other and becomes a millstone around your neck; dragging you down.

Betrayal wounds so deeply that persons and relationships that were there will never recover and, if they do, they won't be the same.

The trust is gone.

When we are betrayed whether it is a jealous friend, adulterous partner, and alcoholic parent or a wayward child, the pain is deep and searing. A real gut punch because it seems to come out of nowhere, in the dark of night.

Your initial reaction is to hit back and match your pain's depth with the depth of the wound you want to inflict upon whomever is in your path regardless of who was the perpetrator.

Betrayal leaves you alone with the feeling of being watched only from afar. You are left only to your devices to raise yourself up when you feel so low and alone.

Betrayal denies your personhood and takes away your sense of value.

That is why it is such a grave sin and what I think God wants us to focus on during this time in Holy Week.

Maybe that is the Good News we need to hear on Good Friday; to be aware.

To be fully aware of what we can do even when we aren't paying attention.

Those little betrayals that can happen. Those little cuts.

Gossip and words that cut down and wound that person because you feel afraid, left out of something that would give you a sense of control because your friend, family member or stranger on the street threatens you in some way.

Betrayals don't need to be big and, may not be readily known by you, but they eventually will hurt and kill your sense of wellbeing and the ability to love and feel compassion for another.

When you have felt betrayed, how long does it take for you to recover?

Do you ever forget them?

How many tears do you have you shed before you can stop?

How long do you plan your vengeance until you get over it and give it up?

Or do you?

Do you speak to that person or persons who betrayed you again?

Engage in their lives again?

Does your relationship end?

We know that Jesus forgave his transgressors. All of them!

He forgave all those who were unaware in their complicitness to abandon him too.

His love and compassion for them overcame his woundedness.

His love and compassion lifted Him to stay on His cross.

Jesus is our model to stay strong and raise ourselves to a higher level awareness well beyond our human base instincts that keep us down like a millstone around our necks.

Jesus is our model of freedom from human hurts while shedding light on what it is:

To live in love, not in hate or fear.

To forgive, move on and let go.

To recognize and be aware that what is most important is to preserve our relationship with the greatest relationship you will ever have, your God and Creator.

Because when you betray a person, you betray your God.
When you deny a person of their personhood and value with your betrayal,
you deny God.

Jesus models what love looks like on this Good Friday. He shows that love
undergirds our crosses.
Jesus carried his own cross in love. We carry ours in love too as we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.