

# Instead of Me

Message #3 – “Betrayed for Me”  
Matthew 26:20-29

St. Paul’s United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
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*<sup>20</sup> When it was evening, Jesus took his place with the twelve; <sup>21</sup> and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” <sup>22</sup> And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” <sup>23</sup> He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. <sup>24</sup> The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” <sup>25</sup> Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”*

*<sup>26</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” <sup>27</sup> Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (Matthew 26:20-29)*

A lot can happen at the dinner table.

When I was growing up, there were two standards: First, we always ate dinner together. No matter what was going on, no matter what mood someone had, no matter who was angry at whom (which happened periodically when my brothers and I were teenagers), we all got ourselves to the table for dinner. Dinner was sacred space. That’s when we talked about our day. That’s when we reviewed what went right... and what went wrong. It was the place of celebrations... and it was the place where reminders were given about the rules. With very few exceptions, we always ate dinner together.

Second, we always had pasta on Sunday. While biologically I’m half Italian with the other half being a combination of German, English, American Indian and Scotch-Irish (or was that Irish will a little Scotch... or was it Irish relatives who drank Scotch... I’m not sure about that!)... even though I have that mix in me, growing up we tended to favor the Italian side of traditions. Sunday was for pasta. For many years, Sunday dinner was also at my grandmother’s house. And often, it involved the extended family. Lots of laughter, lots of animated conversations... and lots and lots of pasta. Why pasta? Well... pasta just makes everything better, right?

I have very fond memories about dinner times – especially on Sundays at grandmas. Did I mention the pasta?

Well, with large family gatherings (and sometimes with small ones), there’s a mixture of a whole bunch of different personalities. When you bring different personalities together with all

of the cultural values and traditions and then throw into the mix a smorgasbord of emotions, reactions, egos, hormones... and indigestion, in addition to the love, there's bound to be a clash or two... or more... that upsets the natural rhythm of everybody getting along.

Some of those clashes I remember would get pretty heated. It was actually in the midst of some of those heated moments that I learned a very important lesson – a lesson that came to me in the form of a question: **"What's more important - *being right* or *doing right*?"**

A lot indeed can happen at the dinner table.

Jesus experienced that too. In Matthew 26:20-21, we read that it was at a dinner table where Jesus would do two things that would significantly impact the lives of those twelve disciples from that day forward: First, He dropped a bombshell. And second, He gave them hope.

Let's look at what it says starting in verses 20 and 21...

*<sup>20</sup> When it was evening, Jesus took his place with the twelve; <sup>21</sup> and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."*

Notice a few things here... First, it says that it was "evening" and "Jesus took his place with the twelve." As we learned in last week's message, this meal was Passover. This was the annual gathering of faithful Jews around the Passover table to remember how God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. It was a sacred gathering—a time to retell the stories of the Exodus, to remember the hardships of their ancestors, and to anticipate a new day that would come when God would redeem them yet again. But this Passover was different than others. This would be Jesus's last supper, His final meal. Jesus knew it. And the disciples knew it too – but as we had seen, they just didn't get it. They just didn't understand -- even though Jesus had warned them several times what was about to happen.

Now, it says **"Jesus took his place with the twelve."** For many years, I would just gloss right over this verse... but it's really an important verse for today's message. I titled today's message, "Betrayed for us." We're focusing on how Jesus faced into His own betrayal leading up to His arrest, torture, crucifixion and death. Those of us who know the story, we know who the betrayer is – it's Judas. In fact, in verse 25, Matthew even tells us that Judas is "the betrayer." But in that moment, in real time, no one knew that fact... no one except Jesus... and Judas. And Judas, at this time, didn't know that Jesus knew.

But look at this... **"Jesus took his place *with the twelve*."** If you knew that one of your friends, one of your closest compadres was about to betray you, and you knew how it was going to happen... would you want to eat dinner with him or her? Yet, Jesus was doing something very intentional. Jesus was focusing on a greater mission, a larger purpose. He wasn't just focusing on how He was feeling related to being betrayed. As we learned last week, "His time was *now*." Judas was present at the table. And Jesus took his place with *all twelve* of the disciples. Could I do that? Or would I have asked Judas to leave? Or would I have faked a stomachache or headache to avoid doing the dinner? Or would I have exposed Judas in front of the rest of the group?

**"What's more important - *being right* or *doing right*?"**

So, they began the Passover meal. It says here in verse 21, **"*while they were eating...*"** The Passover meal was highly symbolic. On the table for Passover were a number of food and drink

items that were used symbolically to represent elements of the Exodus story – what God did in setting the Israelites free from bondage in Egypt. In fact, the meal followed a specific ritual flow, a rhythm from start to finish.

The meal began with a blessing and the drinking of a cup of red wine mixed with water. This was the first of four cups that would be on the table – each representing one of the four “I will” promises of God in Exodus 6:6-7. This **first cup** was known as the “**Cup of Sanctification**” and it recalled when God said, *“I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians.”*

After sharing this cup, the participants **washed their hands** – as part of a ritual cleansing to prepare them for the next segment of the meal. It may have been at this point when, according to John’s Gospel, Jesus would have gotten up from the table, taken off His robe and put on the towel of a servant and instead of washing hands, He washed the feet of the disciples. It’s a very powerful and humbling account that I invite you to read about in John 13. Picture Jesus doing this as part of this *special* Passover meal. Imagine Jesus kneeling down before Judas and washing the feet of the one who would go on to betray Him. Imagine what Judas was thinking, what he was feeling in that moment. What would you be thinking or feeling if that were you?

It makes me wonder ... **What does love look like when it is offered to those who betray us?** To answer that question, all we need do is look at Jesus.

Well, after hands – or feet, in this case – are washed, it’s then that the participants in the Passover meal would eat **bitter herbs** that were dipped in salt water – symbolizing the bitterness of slavery. At this point, one of the pieces of matzo – or unleavened bread – specifically, the middle piece within the stack of three that were on the table -- was broken in half. The smaller piece was shared and they would dip it into a sauce made of fruit and vinegar. The larger piece, known as the **Afikoman**, was set aside - or hidden somewhere in the house, if children were present - until the end of the meal – so that it could be “discovered” and then eaten -- becoming the last taste in their mouths when Passover was done.

Then the **second cup** of wine was shared. This was the “**Cup of Deliverance**” (or “Cup of Judgment”) recalling when God said in Exodus 6, *“I will deliver you from their bondage.”* At this point, typically the head of the house would then retell the Passover story, in response to the asking of the historic question, *“Why is this night different for all other nights?”* – usually asked by the youngest in the room.

We don’t know exactly when it occurred, but it may have been at this moment – after sharing the Cup of Deliverance – that Jesus dropped the bombshell. *“Truly I tell you,” He said, “one of you will betray me.”*

Can you imagine being in the room at that moment? Can you imagine being one of those disciples? Can you imagine being Judas – thinking that you’re about to be exposed?

Look at what it says in verse 22 –

*<sup>22</sup> And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?”*

**“Surely not I, Lord?”** Notice that in the translation there’s a question mark connected to this statement. One by one, each disciple poses the question before Jesus – and before the room of other disciples. The original Greek is interesting to me. The way the question is phrased

grammatically it assumes a negative answer. In other words, the disciples are asking the question, but they're assuming that Jesus is hearing them say, "No, that's not me. I would never do that!" And yet, those of us who know the story, we know that at some point during the next several hours, as Jesus is confronted in the Garden of Gethsemane by the guards, every disciple in that room would end up betraying Jesus – passively – by abandoning Him in His time of greatest need. And Jesus knew that. Yet, Jesus still took His place at the table with the twelve.

In response to their presumptive question, Jesus says, in verse 23 –  
*<sup>23</sup> . . . "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me."*

This is an interesting statement – since as the Passover meal continues, all of them are sharing in the dipping bowl. Let me state the obvious again – The betrayer is at the table with Jesus . . . and Jesus knew it. It gets better! Let's keep reading... Then Jesus says, in verse 24...

*<sup>24</sup> The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."*

This is important. This verse mixes together two important truths: First, the mission that has been driving Jesus toward the Cross, toward His death for the sins of humanity, was part of God's plan from the beginning. Jesus was born to die for the sins of humanity. God, yet again, was rescuing His people. But added to that, this verse also reminds us that evil is most often perpetrated by human beings. A human choice, a willful act of betrayal on the part of a friend of Jesus, brought about the plan for Jesus's death. However, no matter what evil chooses to do, God is still at work redeeming His people. Jesus is carrying out His destiny, for sure. But it almost sounds like Jesus is giving Judas yet another invitation to change his plans. In my mind, I'm picturing Jesus looking right at Judas while He's saying these words – using this harsh warning to get Judas to realize that his actions have consequences.

And then we read in verse 25 ... *<sup>25</sup> Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."*

This sounds like it is the same exact question that the other disciples had asked Jesus moments before, but there is a difference. Notice that instead of saying, "Surely, not I, Lord?" Judas uses the term "*Rabbi*." A subtle difference, for sure. Is it significant? I think it is... at least for the writer of Matthew's Gospel. I wonder if, within this subtle word difference, we see a shift in how Judas viewed Jesus – "teacher" rather than "Lord," kind of like how the Pharisees would address Jesus with subtle sarcasm. Regardless, now that he's being called out – Judas puts the question to Jesus... perhaps with less of a conviction that the response would be negative. Again, I picture Jesus and Judas, eyes locked onto each other's, in a moment in time when what is really being communicated is only partly expressed in the words that they are speaking.

Betrayal is a painful experience on so many levels. By definition, betrayal can only happen among those who have a trusting relationship—or a relationship of assumed loyalty. Betrayal occurs when we expose someone else – a person, a group, or even a nation – to danger by passing on information to an enemy or by violating a bond of trust. Betrayal certainly has obvious ramifications – it exposes us and makes us vulnerable. But what makes it even more devastating is the violation of trust that dramatically, and perhaps seismically, rips apart what was thought to have been a relationship of loyalty... a friendship.

Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? A spouse? A colleague?

Have you ever betrayed a friend? A spouse? A colleague?

The intriguing thing for me in this Scripture passage is that, whether or not Judas realized it, the entire experience of the meal that evening was an invitation to grace – an invitation even for Judas to reconsider, even though Jesus knew the final choices that would be made. Judas was invited to the meal. Judas was at the table with Jesus. Judas had his feet washed by the One whom he would betray. Judas heard the additional words of warning. But we know what Judas would go on to do.

While I certainly don't view myself as ever having betrayed someone close to me (at least, not intentionally), when I'm about to do something or say something that implicates another person, Judas's act of betrayal makes me wonder -- **What or who will I undo if I do what I'm about to do?**

It's an important question to ask in light of Jesus's warning to Judas – a question that might actually prevent us from violating the very trust that had defined our relationship: "What or who will I undo if I do what I'm about to do?"

Back at the table... According to John's Gospel, after their exchange, Judas most likely left the room and began his act of betrayal. But for Jesus and the remaining disciples, the meal continued. Following the Cup of Deliverance, the guests would then chant the words of Psalms 113 and 114, what they called the "Hallel." At this point, typically, the **Paschal lamb** would be placed before the guests – and they would eat it as "the supper" – remembering the lambs' blood that was applied to the doorposts and lintel of the Israelite homes so that the Angel of Death would pass over their families. It was to be a "lamb without blemish." Interestingly, some Bible scholars believe that there was no paschal lamb at this particular Passover meal – the "Last Supper" – with Jesus. Instead, of the Paschal lamb, this was the point when Jesus instead took the unleavened bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples and said, "*Take, eat, for this is My body, broken for you,*" as it says in verse 26. In other words, Jesus Himself would be the Paschal lamb, a Lamb without blemish. He would be the sacrifice whose blood would cause death to "pass over" those who believed.

After this "supper," the **third cup** of wine, what was known as the "**Cup of Redemption**," was shared. This cup recalled when God said in Exodus 6, "*I will ... redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.*" This is the cup that we Christians are most familiar with – the cup that Jesus took and said to His disciples, "*Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*" (vv. 27-28).

It was a rather unique moment. It was confusing to the disciples who had grown up participating in the Passover rituals. Jesus was clearly going off script. Jesus was re-imagining everything that they were used to, everything that they had expected. The meal was familiar, but strangely different. Different . . . and foreboding.

Then a **fourth and final cup** of wine was shared. This was "**The Cup of Restoration**" – recalling when God said in Exodus 6, "*I will take you for My people, and I will be your God.*" It may be that Jesus Himself did not drink from this fourth cup – based on what we read in verse 29.

After they shared a blessing, they would have sung the words of Psalms 115-118, the second part of the "Hallel," went searching for the "hidden" piece of unleavened bread, and then eaten

it as the meal was brought to a close. It was at this point that Jesus and His disciples would have left the Upper Room to go to the Garden of Gethsemane . . . and on to a night that would change the trajectory of all of time to come.

So, I wonder . . . Is it possible for us today – that someone could come and share in the Lord's Table, Holy Communion, on a Sunday, and then betray us on a Monday? Is it possible for us to eat the bread we know as Jesus's body and to drink the cup that we know as His blood – all done for us, all reflective of a death He died instead of us ... and then, for us on the next day to betray a friend, a spouse, a colleague, a fellow believer in Christ?

At the beginning of this message, I shared that at the table, Jesus did two significant things – first, He dropped a bombshell. He exposed the fact that He knew He was about to be betrayed and that the betrayer was present at that very table, one of His trusted friends. The second, I said, was that Jesus gave those disciples hope. How?

I believe that hope is embedded in the words we read in verse 29 – words that sound as if they are layered in the language of grief. This is what Jesus says to those at the table with Him:

*29 "I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."*

These words would sound so final, so harsh – if it weren't for the word "**until**." Until. There's the hope. There will be a day, a time coming when Jesus in fact *will* drink the fruit of the vine again... a day when God's kingdom would be realized. A day when God does indeed rescue His people again. It's why Jesus must face into Judas's betrayal, why He must endure the Cross, why He must die.

Each time we share in Holy Communion, we remember what Jesus did – how He embodied the hope borne in the "I will" statements of God in Exodus 6:6-7, when God said:

- "I will bring you out" (of whatever brokenness you are experiencing)
- "I will deliver you" (from the life of bondage to sin – whatever sin you're in)
- "I will redeem you" (by the blood Jesus shed on the Cross)
- "I will take you" (and restore you to a new relationship with the God who created you with Love and purpose)

These are the promises of God that Jesus fulfilled. Betrayal, while harsh, was a small price to pay for the freedom and transformation of humanity. The Passover has been prepared. A lot can happen at the dinner table. Until that day when Jesus returns...What's happening at yours?

Let's pray our prayer together: **Lord, what do You need me to see, what do You need me to hear, what do You need me to know, what do You need me to do? I am Your servant in Jesus's name. Amen.**