Ash Wednesday | John 13:21-30
February 17, 2021 | 98-116-112-98, vv. 5-6

May Christ the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world have mercy on us and grant us His peace. Amen.

Hands of Betrayal

I. The hands of the betrayer.

II. The hands of our betrayed Savior.

Dear Christian friends,

You hear the name ***"Judas"*** and WHAT do you immediately think? The BETRAYER! That's even the way Judas is identified **in the list** of the twelve apostles – ***"Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him (Jesus)"*** – or as Luke put it, ***"who became a traitor."*** That **name "Judas"** just carries SO MUCH BAGGAGE – **so many** negative connotations. Judas is not one of the BIBLE NAMES **parents give** their children!

But prior to the betrayal LOOK at his **reputation**! Judas was one of the TWELVE apostles – prayerfully hand-picked by Jesus to be an **eye-** and **ear-witness** of Jesus' life and ministry. Like the other apostles Judas had been ***"given authority to drive out unclean spirits and to heal every disease and every sickness."*** With the other apostles Judas had been sent out preaching and teaching Jesus ***"to the lost sheep of Israel."*** The other apostles TRUSTED Judas **enough** that he served as the treasurer of the group. It **seems** that none of them HAD ANY SUSPICIONS that Judas ***"was a thief and used to steal what was put into"*** their treasury. EVEN WHEN Jesus dropped this bombshell, ***"Amen, Amen, I tell you: One of you will betray Me"*** – ALL EYES didn't immediately turn to Judas as the MOST LIKELY SUSPECT. ***"The disciples were looking at each other, uncertain which of them He meant."*** They were so shaken by this that they ***"said to Him one by one, "Surely not I?""***

"Hands of the Passion" is the general theme guiding our Lenten worship this year. Tonight we focus on "HANDS OF BETRAYAL." We look 1)**at the hands** of the betrayer and **also** 2)at the hands of our betrayed Savior.

I. The hands of the betrayer.

We dare not look at Judas with even the slightest "HOLIER-THAN-THOU" attitude – with a disdainful – disgusting, "I'd NEVER DO that!" We look at Judas TO LEARN from Judas. Judas had been a **Christian**. Judas had believed that Jesus was the long-promised **Savior** – HIS Savior. Judas had been an EYE and EAR-WITNESS of Jesus' preaching – His miracles, etc. Judas had shared **meals** with Jesus – talked with Jesus. Judas had preached and taught Jesus. SUCH BLESSINGS – such PRIVILEGES and opportunities! AND YET Judas' hands are **hands of betrayal**. Judas sold out Jesus for ***"thirty pieces of silver."*** And **as you know** he committed suicide. Judas DIED DESPAIRING of God's **mercy** and **forgiveness**. We look to learn from Judas so WE DON'T FOLLOW in his **footsteps** – don't repeat his **mistakes**.

Just like all of us here tonight Judas was born with a **sinful nature** – a sinful nature NO DIFFERENT from yours or mine. That **sinful nature** hates God – sees God as the ENEMY – the PROBLEM. That **sinful nature** fights God EVERY STEP of the **way** – ALL THE DAY **long**. That sinful nature is a willing ally with the **devil** – a good friend of the **world**. That sinful nature is so stubborn – so defiant – so STRONG and DETERMINED. And if you think that DOESN'T DESCRIBE your sinful nature you're only fooling yourself.

The Bible reveals that Judas' sinful nature had a PARTICULAR WEAKNESS for **greed** – but evidently Judas was ABLE TO HIDE that from the other apostles. A few days before this – when Mary had

anointed Jesus' feet with some VERY EXPENSIVE perfume (worth about a year's wages!) – Judas had protested that this was a **waste of money**. He argued that the **perfume should have** been sold and the money given to the poor. But the Bible reveals his REAL MOTIVE. ***"He did not say this because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief. He held the money box and used to steal (from) it."***

The ***"love of money"*** was a real temptation and STRUGGLE for Judas and the devil knew HOW TO USE it **against Judas**. AT FIRST there was no thought of **betraying** Jesus. It started small – HELPING himself to some of the money in the disciples' treasury. But as that sin went UNREPENTED and UNCHECKED it took over more and more in Judas' heart. Then came the day. ***"Satan entered Judas,"*** Luke tells us and OFF JUDAS WENT to meet with the chief priests and ***"discuss with them how he might betray Jesus."*** They agree on the ***"thirty pieces of silver"*** and from then on Judas ***"watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present."*** Now with the betrayal JUST HOURS AWAY John informs us, ***"As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him."*** When Jesus is pushed out of a person's heart and life Satan moves in and TAKES CONTROL. Paul warns us that, ***"Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into complete destruction and utter ruin. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evils. By striving for money, some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains."*** Judas is a POSTER CHILD for that **sad truth**.

Look and learn from Judas' **hands of betrayal**! Learn never to UNDERESTIMATE your **sinful nature** and what wickedness it's **capable** of. Learn to NEVER GET COZY with your **sinful nature** or COMFORTABLE with your own particular pet sin.

Each one of us has our OWN PARTICULAR weakness and the devil knows **all about** it. The **devil knows** how to use that sin to DRIVE A WEDGE between us and Jesus. For Judas it was his **greed** and ***"love of money."*** One person might have a REAL STRUGGLE with drinking too much. Another person couldn't CARE LESS about drinking but instead really struggles with **gossiping** and having to know **everybody's business**. For somebody else it can be PORNOGRAPHY on the internet – or constantly complaining about whatever – or not taking time for FAITHFUL WORSHIP and **daily devotions**. We probably all struggle AT TIMES with a LACK OF TRUST in **God's ways** – questioning and doubting God's **love** – His **wisdom** – His **promises**.

Learn from Judas that becoming COMFORTABLE with our sin – making excuses for our sin – is the devil working to DRIVE Jesus OUT of our hearts – the devil trying to move in instead. Learn the need for DAILY REPENTANCE – that sin unchecked and **unrepentant** just KEEPS GROWING and **taking over**. Learn from Judas that we CAN HIDE our sins from others but never from God. Ignoring and **defying** God doesn't bring **anyone** CLOSER to God – JUST CLOSER to hell.

Now let's look at…

II. The hands of our betrayed Savior.

Jesus' hands are hands of COMPASSION. Jesus is ***"troubled in spirit."*** He knows all about Judas and what's **going to happen** in the next twenty-four hours. He ***"testifies"*** – NOT GUESSING but stating as fact – ***"Amen, Amen, I tell you: One of you will betray Me."*** Did that announcement STARTLE Judas – at least GET HIS ATTENTION? In love Jesus was REACHING OUT **yet again** to Judah telling him, "I KNOW what you're up to, Judas. STOP – repent – ***'resist the devil and he will flee from you."***"

Jesus deals FIRMLY yet GRACIOUSLY with Judas. He doesn't SPECIFICALLY NAME him – it's just ***"one of you."*** As the others are ***"looking around"*** at each other – asking, ***"Surely, not I, Lord?"*** – Jesus is QUIETLY CALLING Judas to repent of his sin and hold tightly to Jesus **instead of the money**.

Does Judas remember Jesus saying, ***"What will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for his soul?"*** Even as Jesus SINGLES OUT Judas by giving him that ***"dipped piece of bread"*** the only ones who REALLY KNEW **what that meant** were Peter and John and even they DIDN'T FULLY understand. John admits, ***"None of those reclining at the table understood why Jesus said this to him."***

Look at the hands of our **betrayed Savior**. Do you see them BECKONING you to turn from your sin and hold tightly to Him? Do you see your compassionate Savior NOT PUSHING you **away** in disgust but REACHING OUT to draw you closer to Him?

Look and see the hands of our **betrayed Savior** FIRMLY IN CONTROL of the situation. Judas and the chief priests had SECRETLY DONE their plotting and **planning**. They thought they had things **both** FIGURED OUT and UNDER WRAPS. But their plans were **not going** to INTERFERE with God's plans. Their plans called for **Judas to betray** Jesus for the agreed price of ***"thirty pieces of silver"*** but NOT ***"during the Feast (Passover) or there may be a riot."*** God's plans called for **all this** to happen THAT VERY NIGHT! ***"So Jesus told (Judas), 'What you are about to do, do more quickly.'"*** You know WHAT FOLLOWS.

Look and see the hands of our **betrayed Savior** STRETCHED OUT on that cross. They're not the hands of a HELPLESS VICTIM – but the hands of ***"God's beloved Son"*** – the sinless Son of God – nailed to that cross as ***"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** See Jesus NOT JUST betrayed by Judas – denied by Peter – abandoned by the others – but ESPECIALLY ***"forsaken"*** by His Father as He endures the **hell** and **punishment** WE DESERVED because of our sins. See flowing from Jesus' NAIL-PIERCED hands the ***"blood of God's Son, that cleanses us from all sin"*** – the blood Jesus shed ***"for the forgiveness"*** of all our sins. See those STRETCHED OUT hands of our **betrayed Savior** and see just how much God LOVES you – that ***"He did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all."***

Judas didn't live to SEE OR BELIEVE that. He died IN DESPAIR – convinced by the devil that there was NO WAY God ever could or would forgive him for **betraying Jesus**. But the very heart of the gospel is the GOOD NEWS – the BLESSED FACT! – that Jesus is the Savior of the **world**. The perfect life Jesus lived – He lived FOR ALL people. Jesus' innocent death on the cross is ***"the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world."*** Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross FULLY PAID for all sins of all people - NO SIN **excluded** – NO PERSON **excluded**. Jesus' Easter victory over death and the grave is God's promise of eternal life in heaven **to all who believe** in Jesus as their Savior.

Yes, we are safe – we are LOVED – we are FORGIVEN – we have eternal life in heaven – IN THE HANDS of our **betrayed Savior**. Amen.