

Sermon Text for March 18, 2018

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Genesis 18:22-33, Mark 14:32-42

“Jesus the betrayed”

We continue on with our device free lent and I hope that you are making strides, or at least aware of how much devices have been playing in your life and during this time of lent you are taking a break. Let me tell you a story about one of our high school students. This student over a week period was uncharacteristically not responding and not communicating with his parents when they were reaching out. Twice they needed to meet him at school and pick him up and both times he barely got the message and it created some anxiety. When it happened the second time the mother sat down with him because it simply was not who he was, it was completely out of character and he said sheepishly, I’m trying device free lent so I didn’t get any of your messages. I turn off my phone and put it in my backpack when I get to school. So, who knew that device free lent can also get you into trouble?

Throughout this lent we have been looking at Mark and specifically chapter 14 where we find Jesus and his disciples as a family, a community heading to his last few days, even now today, his last few hours and their last few moments together. We have heard about the need to focus upon Jesus even while the distractions and the attractions of this culture beckon to us. We have heard how important it is to be aware that we are in fact those who betray the Lord and we have to create disciplines and opportunities for us to focus even more on our Savior. Today we see the beginning stages of Jesus’ betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, and what we find is that even in the overwhelming presence of betrayal, Jesus remains faithful, his devotion to His Father and to us never wanes.

Mark’s depiction of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is dramatic, the roles that the disciples play are obvious. We are the ones who betray the betrayed Jesus. Our lesson to learn today is how do we remain faithful to God, to our family, even in the face of our own betrayal, or even in the face of being betrayed. Are we able to emulate the everlasting love and extravagant grace that Jesus exhibits in the midst of his betrayal, or do we react as the world teaches us to react which is with vengeance and anger. Let’s read.

READ

This past Wednesday we set a record. We had to reschedule our mid-week children's program which takes place once a month because for the second consecutive month it snowed on the first Wednesday of the month. We had a good number of kids, between children and nursery we have over 40 children. But that wasn't our record, our record was that through the evening there was a stretch where at the same time we had not one, not two, not three, not four, not five, not six, not seven but eight pooppy diapers at once in the nursery. It was a scene from top 10 worst moments in the history of First Presbyterian, but just the fact that we had over 10 children in the nursery was encouraging too. I'm not sure Amy and Ali have quite recovered from that, so when you see them make sure you thank them, no really, make sure you thank them. And hey, if anyone wants to help out in the nursery we can always use you. How about that for incentive?

Last week we saw that Jesus and his disciples are on a high as they find themselves cleaning up after the Last Supper and singing songs on their way out the door and through the streets of Jerusalem. Our first Scripture reading today has Abraham and God dialoguing about what God is about to do with Sodom and Gomorrah. You see, part of the problem is that Abraham's nephew, Lot, lives in Sodom and God has made up his mind to destroy it because it is so wicked. So Abraham says: Just because most of the people betray you in that wicked and vile city, you wouldn't destroy the city if there is a good representation of righteous people, say like 50 people? You would save the city wouldn't you? You are, after all, the creator of the heavens and the earth and should not the judge of the earth do that which is just? I mean you would not betray those 50 righteous people, would you?

God answers and says he would save the city for 50 and Abraham continues to confront God with the fact that he is righteous and just and that even for 45 or 40 or and he gets it all the way down to 10 and God says he would save the city, a city full of sin and people who have betrayed him and continue to betray him. For a handful of righteous people I will save the city. So Abraham is satisfied that the city can't be that bad. It ends up being worse than he even imagined.

But this dialogue reminds us that God has a history of not only remaining faithful in the face of betrayal, but raises the ante to extravagant generosity in the face of betrayal. That is who our God is. Think of the entire book of Judges, they did what was evil in the sight of God. Think of the march across the wilderness. Think of the righteous branch that arises out of Jesse.

Think of the prodigal son. Think of the lost sheep. There remains in Scripture a consistent story of God being betrayed and God responding in generosity and love. We would be wise to remember that theme in Lent when we face the most tragic betrayals in all of history. I'm not just talking of Judas and Jesus, Judas isn't even mentioned in this Scripture in Mark that we read this morning, but betrayal is.

We need to set the stage for this morning's Scripture in Mark in case you haven't been here during Lent at all. Things are going well, the disciples and Jesus celebrate the Passover Meal together, their last Supper together after an exciting week of parades in Jerusalem, driving out money changers in the temple, healings that draw crowds. Jesus and his disciples are riding high and their stock has never been higher and things are going well. Jesus puts a bit of a damper on things when he tells them that they will all betray him, but Peter reacts strongly enough that it allows them to go out of their home singing as they head from Jerusalem across the valley to the Garden of Gethsemane.

The Garden of Gethsemane is on the Mount of Olives which is directly across from Jerusalem. You can see Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives as you walk down the valley and then up the mount. Gethsemane means simply oil press, which makes sense because the hillside would have been filled with olive trees which were cultivated and used for oil and for eating. In 2019, so nearly a year from now, we will be leading another group to Israel from this church and from across the world actually, and when we visit the Mount of Olives you find that it is one of the most holy and powerful places you will see in Israel. You can almost feel the weight of that evening pressing upon you as you visit it, even in the light of day. So that is where we find ourselves today. On the Mount of Olives after a big meal, after much celebration which is associated with the Passover.

When they arrive he tells the 11, Judas would have left to betray Jesus by now, to sit where they were while he went off to pray. That is not unusual for Jesus. In Mark Jesus goes off to pray by himself two other times, interestingly enough it is at the very beginning of his ministry in Mark 1:35, then at the middle of his ministry in Mark 6:46 and now here at the very end of his ministry. He then takes the three disciples that we know were part of his inner circle, Peter, James and John and goes off with them and begins to show his true emotional state. He doesn't do that in front of the whole group, but he does in front of Peter, James and John. It is at this

time that he reveals to them that he is an emotional wreck, he is grieved even to the point of death. They don't respond but he tells them to stay awake.

He goes off by himself and throws himself prostrate on the ground asking that this martyrdom would be taken away from him. Jesus was not looking forward to what was coming next. As I was preparing for this and encountering this very dramatic, emotional scene it crept into my mind that Jesus was afraid. It's okay to be afraid, but I've never thought of Jesus being afraid before. But if you actually read the Scripture you hear him say that he is grieved. He knows that he is going to be betrayed by his closest followers, it grieves him and breaks his heart. There must be some other way that we can get this thing done without the people that I love the most turning their back on me. That was the source of his desperation was the fact that the people that he loved would betray him.

He prays, Abba, Father, take this cup away from me. Now, Abba is Aramaic and it means simply Father. It is not a diminutive, it is not Daddy, it is simply Father in a language other than Greek or Hebrew, it is the language that Jesus would have spoken. You see, father's can fix everything, right? If you need help when you are kid, your dad could do anything, at least my dad could. Father, you can fix this, but let your will be done. Father, you would never turn your back on me, but they are about to, but let your will be done.

Three times he turns back to find his disciples sleeping, in one account it reads that they were caught in the act and they didn't know what to say. Just like on the Mount of Transfiguration where Peter didn't know what he said so he said something stupid. You see for Jesus, and for all of us, betrayal elicits grief, heart-break. He doesn't want to go through with it and suffer that. He loves his family, he knows they will abandon him, he just knows it. Because we have a history of that. For you Romans scholars remember what Paul said about our loving God? Romans 5:8 – But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners, Christ died for us. While we in the act of betraying him, while we denied him, Christ still died for us.

In the face of betrayal God not only remains faithful, but exhibits extravagant generosity. Lent is a time to settle in on the truth that we betray. It is a time to surround ourselves with the presence of God and with disciplines which draw us closer to God. The difference here between Jesus and Peter is not that Peter's spirit is unwilling or that Jesus' flesh is not frail, for he too feels the terror of death, it is that Jesus faces up to the struggle of the demons within, the urge to

betray, through prayer. The weakness of the flesh is always put up against the commitment to the will of God. We will always find ourselves on the line between betrayal and faithfulness.

We know that when Jesus was faced with that line, he chose faithfulness. If we only prayed as much as we used our devices, or watched basketball, or watched TV. Our loyalty is questionable, God's is not. When we are betrayed we look for vengeance. When Jesus is betrayed he looks for someone to forgive, he prays and remains faithful and showers us with extravagant blessings. May we look to do the same. Amen.