

P Christ is risen!
C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear church, I proclaim to you that which is of first importance...it is what I in turn had received and what you all receive: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that Christ was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...and now today, to each of us gather in his holy name here in this place. So I say, welcome to all who gather this glorious Easter morning! Christ is present...He is risen indeed, alleluia!

What a glorious morning it is AFTER a very somber and profoundly meaningful Holy Three Days that brought us to this glorious morning. What a blessing it is to be able to welcome you all to celebrate this love given to us in the Lord God's risen Son Jesus Christ! Our Easter service today began Thursday Evening with the opening of our Maundy Thursday service. In that worship service we heard of the act of betrayal and how that act by Judas began this Eastertide and assured Jesus the cross.

And like Thomas who will soon get tagged with the title of Doubting Thomas, the name of Judas is often used synonymously with betrayal or treason. Contrary to the betrayal and treason association, the name of Judas is a Greek rendering of the very common Hebrew name for men that means "praise or praised." Nonetheless, in the Gospel lesson for Maundy Thursday, Judas disappears into the darkness.

Later we learn that Judas betrays Jesus to the Sanhedrin in the Garden of Gethsemane with a kiss. After this kiss, Jesus is taken to the cross and Judas is remembered as history's most famous traitor. Matthew, Mark, and John proclaim that Judas betrayed Jesus, Luke is the only one who calls Judas a traitor. But keep in mind that in this act of betrayal or treason, Judas Iscariot fulfilled the prophecy within Psalm 41:

⁹ Even my best friend, whom I trusted, who broke bread with me,
has lifted up his heel and turned against me. (Ps 41:9)

Herein is the puzzling nature of the twelve disciples who lived with and followed Jesus, who witnessed the ministry of Jesus, sat at his feet as students of His teaching, witnessed firsthand His many miracles...but they all desert Jesus after Jesus is arrested and put on trial...dare I say that they all, in some way...betray Jesus?

But in the appointed Gospel lesson for Mundy Thursday we hear that when at table with Jesus in the Gospel of John, Judas is outted as the one who betrays our Lord. And we hear that at that Holy Meal Jesus indicates who the betrayer is by handing him a piece of bread:

³⁰ ...after receiving the piece of bread, [Judas] immediately went out. And it was night.
(John 13:30)

Judas gets up from the table and heads out into the night. I emphasize "night" or the darkness

because in the Gospel of John the use of “night” and “darkness” is often taken as a symbol of evil or unbelief. In the Gospel we hear Jesus saying things like,

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life,” (8:12)

and

“I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness,” (12:46).

But Judas, during that Holy Meal when he is recognized as the one who will betray Jesus, we can say that he immediately goes out into the darkness of evil or unbelief.

That was the theme of Thursday evening’s text...I continue this theme of betrayal and darkness this morning because I know as I said Thursday evening, none of us gathered here today would say we would betray or attempt to betray our Lord...but we do.

It’s very easy to point the finger at Judas and label him as the traitor or the one who betrays Jesus because that’s exactly what Jesus does. However, Jesus can do this...we can only point to Judas as a means of stepping on Judas to elevate ourselves. We use Judas to feel better about our own betrayal of all that Jesus teaches us and gives to us.

No matter how we feel about this, we do betray who we are as Christian followers of Jesus Christ. We fall short as people of faith...we fall short as God’s Children...and this betrayal of Judas only sheds light on our own betrayal. Saint Paul reminds us all of this in his letter to the Romans:

¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. (Romans 7:16-19)

Personally, this passage speaks to me because I do not do the good I want...or the things I am called to do, in that I do not do as I ought...I do not love others as God loves me. But as we consider this, we know too that in our hearts and through our faith we know that we are not left to our failures our shortcomings, or our betrayal of our call as children of God.

We may not like this association with Judas, because we envision our faith as a faith that would not betray, would not allow us to turn our backs on Jesus or hand him over...but we do betray our Lord. We do so by definition of the term “betray” in that we *unintentionally reveal* our sins. We are evidence of our sin in that we do not love our neighbor because in the darkness of our culture and the darkness of the world, we cannot see God’s grace in our neighbors.

We have difficulty seeing grace for humanity...or seeing grace for those people out there...who do not think like me or vote like me...those people out there who don’t live like me...those people out there who don’t see things the way I see things...those people out there who live a different life style, and worship differently or don’t worship at all...they are the neighbors who

are undeserving of God's grace...and undeserving of my love...because... my sins are unseen...but theirs are not. We end up stepping on the sins of our neighbors in order to elevate ourselves from our sins instead of seeing the grace that is given our neighbor...is the same grace given to me through faith in Jesus Christ.

I continue preaching this theme from Thursday evening because in the darkness of the death of Jesus, this betrayal of faith is what Mary reveals for us at the tomb of Jesus this morning. Listen again to the opening of our Gospel lesson:

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." (John 20:1-2)

In the darkness, Mary runs from the tomb to tell Peter and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, that the stone had been removed from the tomb and that they have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him. While it was still dark, in her tears we can imagine that fear has consumed her...or that in the darkness behind her tears we might also say that Mary may have doubted. In that Darkness that has consumed Mary, she can only see a gardener asking her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

In the darkness, Mary sees a gardener instead of seeing Jesus. But suddenly, Jesus speaks and the light of Christ breaks the darkness of fear, the darkness of doubt...from the words of Jesus, Mary sees Jesus and NOT the gardener. In the exchange between Mary and Jesus at the opening of the grave, we see the revelation of our unintentional sins. We see our betrayal, our unintentional sins in that same darkness, the darkness that does not allow us to see Christ in others...to see the promise of grace given to all...we too simply see the sins of the person instead of seeing a forgiven sinner just like me, like you, and like them. In that darkness, we cannot see the grace of the Incarnate Word of Jesus Christ that speaks to them and us...the same Word of grace that allowed Mary to see Jesus instead of the gardener is the same Word spoken for all to see.

Perhaps in our world today, we merely see sinners like Judas...sinners we can use to step on in order to elevate our own sin...in that, I know I am sinner BUT my sins are not as bad as theirs! And we usually turn that situation to our favor by saying, we cannot see Christ in others because THEY do not believe...but seeing Christ in others has nothing to do with *their faith* and everything to do with our faith.

When Jesus says, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life, do we really believe that we can select who can see that light...if we do...then...that's simply as ridiculous as turning a light on in a crowded dark room and assuming only a select few can see it.

As we refuse or deny the grace for others, we betray Jesus in that we betray the very grace given us if we cannot see the grace for others. Jesus does not tell us to love the neighbor who believes...the neighbor we like...he simply says, "love your neighbor," or better yet, listen to what Jesus says according to Matthew and Luke:

But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
(Luke 6:27)

Jesus goes on to say:

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. (Luke 6:35)

But are we?

On this Easter morning, the light of Christ breaks the darkness of death...breaks the darkness of unbelief, the darkness of evil, and or the darkness of sin...NOT just for us gathered in here...the light of the risen Christ has broken forth upon the whole world and does the same for those out there as it does for us in here. The light of Jesus Christ has brought us out of darkness and has made us all light to the world!

On this day, as we depart from this tomb, we call the church...may we depart in the light of the risen Son NOT to step on others or put them down in order to elevate ourselves, may we remain true to our faith and see the light of the Risen Jesus Christ in others, may we see the light of grace and new life that overcomes the darkness and doubt in our journeys. May we depart in the light of the courage of the One who walks with us and lights our way through the darkness of this world. May we depart from here this Easter morning in the light that will allow us all to exult and sing with all the Host of Heaven at the end of our journey here in this world¹...
Christ has risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

¹ Sermon closes with the words adapted from the lyrics of the fourth verse of hymn 808, "Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song" or the French title, *Jésus, je voudrais te chanter* found in the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Pub. House, 2006, by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.