

## **Sunday, April 14: Luke 22-23**

### Chapter 22

Vs. 1-38, The Greek word that has been translated “betray” simply means “to hand over.” While of course Judas is cast as the villain by the Gospel writers, there is some debate in modern scholarship as to whether or not Judas betrayed him to death on purpose, or whether he simply wanted to bring Jesus before the authorities to work out a peace between them or convince him to leave Jerusalem quietly before any riots broke out. We will never know for sure. What we do know is that without Judas’ action, Jesus would not have gone to the cross and rose from the dead for our salvation. Though Satan, the accuser, was the one whom the Gospel writers cite as why Judas acted the way he did, and though certainly his “betrayal” was painful to Jesus, his actions were crucial to God’s plan.

Peter and John were sent to prepare the Passover meal for all of the disciples. Passover celebrations include ritual drinking of wine at the beginning and end of the meal. Jesus connects the bread in the meal with his own body, saying that it is given “for you” to his disciples. As Lutherans, receiving the sacrament as given “for you” is especially important. Our “personal relationship with Jesus Christ” is established through the sacrament of Baptism, and sustained through our ongoing participation in Holy Communion, as we receive Christ’s own physical self into our selves. This meal strengthens us, just as the last supper strengthened Jesus. Jesus’ blood is the sign of the new covenant, God’s promises to give us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through the sacraments, reminiscent of the covenant God made with Moses during the Exodus story (Exodus 24: 8, Exodus 19-34 establishes and describes the Mosaic covenant).

True leadership, according to Jesus, is servant leadership. Jesus promises the disciples that they don’t have to worry about who is the greatest, for they will all sit on thrones around the table in his kingdom, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. This is why there must be 12 apostles, and why –after Judas dies- they swiftly replace him with Matthias in Acts. Jesus prays for Peter’s ability to minister to and strengthen the other apostles when he returns to the fold after his denial of Jesus.

Jesus prepares his apostles for what is immediately to follow –his arrest as a bandit. Banditry was a blanket charge in the Roman empire, the penalty for which was death. They arrested Jesus as a bandit (his apostle’s possession of swords added credence to that claim), the same thing with which Barabbas was charged. Jesus warns his apostles that these charges

are to fulfill his role as the suffering servant according to scripture (Isaiah 53:12 to be exact). Two swords are enough to justify the charges of lawless behavior/ banditry.

Vs. 39-71, Prayer is one of the key themes in Luke's gospel, Jesus spends many nights alone, praying. Here, he asks for his disciples to pray with him. Jesus' prayer asks the Father to make a new way, if possible, for God's mission of salvation to be fulfilled. "If there is any other way..." But, even in the face of this arrest, trial, and death, that he's justifiably afraid of, Jesus commits himself to God's will in the situation, just as we all pray every time we pray the Lord's prayer "Thy will be done."

The emotions in this passage are powerful. Jesus is on the verge of a panic attack (vs. 44), but is strengthened by the presence of an angel. Meanwhile, his apostles who are supposed to be the ones comforting and supporting him, are so grieved by what they now realize is to come, that they fall asleep. They just can't cope. When the Temple militia finally arrives to take Jesus away, Judas points out to them who Jesus is by greeting him with a kiss. This was a common sign of affection, showing the close friendship that would have existed between Jesus and Judas. They needed Judas to point Jesus out to them because there would have been lots of other pilgrims camping out on the Mount of Olives that night in preparation for the Passover. They arrested him by night so as not to attract the attention of the crowds in Jerusalem, who would have certainly started a riot in Jesus' defense. Here, during his arrest, Jesus performs his very last miracle by healing the ear of the high priest's slave. Jesus lives out "love your enemy."

Peter denies Jesus, just as foretold. Jesus is mocked and beaten by the militia of the Temple. They were not allowed to hold trials in the night, so at dawn the assembly of elders and priests begin to question him. They ask if he is the Messiah, the Son of God, (both royal titles from the Old Testament) to catch him in blasphemy. This was for their own justification, blasphemy was not punishable by death according to the Romans. Jesus says that just by their rejection and abuse of him that they are confirming the ancient prophecies that he is the Messiah ("You say that I am.")

## Chapter 23

Vs 1-25, The charges that the Temple authorities bring against him are actually the opposite of what Jesus was teaching in the Temple. Jesus never directly said that he was the Messiah (he simply implied it), and Jesus actually told them to “render to Caesar that which is Caesar’s and to God that which is God’s.” When Pilate hears that Jesus is a Galilean, he’s sent to Herod. Herod’s hobby is collecting God’s prophets for his own amusement and intellectual stimulation. This is the same Herod who held John the Baptist captive and used to enjoy listening to him until he killed him to preserve his reputation. Herod has been looking for Jesus for a long time (to kill him? See Luke 13: 31-35).

Pilate was ruthless, this story paints a fairly charitable portrait of him in an attempt to cast the majority of the blame on the Jewish religious authorities, but the reality is that Pilate and Pilate alone had the power and authority to bring about Jesus’ death. The crowd was volatile, demanding Jesus’ death, and this story shows Pilate as being just as scared of the crowds as the Temple authorities were, however, history shows that Pilate thought nothing of putting down rebellion with severe measures (Luke 13: 1-2). Pax Romana was preserving the peace through whatever means necessary.

Vs. 26-56, Crucifixion was the penalty for banditry, it was a humiliating form of execution that Romans only used on those whom they oppressed. By crucifying Jesus, Rome is saying “we treat your ‘king’ like our slave.” Jesus prays for those who are crucifying him, and those who mock him. There was some sense that the Messiah, a military leader against Israel’s enemies, would have been able to get down off the cross and put Rome in its place (as reflected in the first criminal’s comments). The second criminal is repentant and turns to Jesus, trusting that he is somehow able to put a good word in for him with God. Jesus promises him paradise. Even on the cross, Jesus offers forgiveness to his enemies and comfort to others.

Jesus’ crucifixion is accompanied by cosmic signs (darkness at midday and the tearing of the curtain in the Temple). The curtain in the Temple was approximately 60 feet high and 4 inches thick. Only God would have been able to tear this curtain which separated the holy of holies (the place where the high priest went once a year to atone for the sin of Israel) from the rest of the temple. In tearing the curtain, one can interpret this event to mean that we no longer need this separation from God, that in Jesus’ death we no

longer need a mediator between God and humanity, for Jesus' death is the final sacrifice for sin.

The centurion declared that Jesus was innocent/righteous, suggesting that this was not only a gross miscarriage of Roman justice, but an event that God would work to redeem because of God's care for the righteous.

The "women who followed him from Galilee" are the same women who provided for Jesus' ministry, and the same women who will arrive at the tomb on Sunday to discover the resurrection. They are his most courageous and faithful disciples.

Joseph of Arimathea, a secret follower of Jesus, had the respectability to be able to request his body and give him a proper burial. The women spend the last remaining hours before sunset preparing the burial spices and ointments, which they would return to the tomb with on Sunday to attempt to "finish the job" of burying him according to Jewish custom.