

November 13 2016

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 98

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Sermon Overcome Betrayal

Luke 21:5-19

When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’

They asked him, ‘Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?’

And he said, ‘Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and, “The time is near!” Do not go after them. ‘When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.’ Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. ‘But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.

It was a sad, frustratingly familiar story. Two young men were arrested for arranging with a big-time drug trafficker to import cocaine into their community. The 22-year olds would become the drugs main dealers; selling cocaine to all the teenagers they could get interested in, and then addicted to, the potent pleasure drug. Because this deal crossed the state lines; it was the FBI who finally moved in and made the arrests, breaking up the alliance between the locals and their out-of-state suppliers, cutting off the drug supply to the teens of that community.

What was so shocking about this otherwise so common story? What brought this drug story prominent play on network news? The community was Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The two men arrested were members of the Amish

community. The teenage customers cut off from their drug supply were young Amish boys.

The parents of all these young people were like every parent; stunned to think such a thing could happen in their community, shocked that such a drug tragedy could involve their own children. But this story shakes all parents. For if the lure and danger of drugs could infiltrate the cloistered, close-knit community that the Amish have intentionally built up as a bulwark against the sins and seductions of the world; what chance do any of the rest of us have of keeping our own families, schools, and communities safe?

Perhaps the most disturbing and insidious part of this story for the Amish community was that this betrayal came at the hands of two of their own. It was not outsiders, but insiders who jeopardized their youth's safety and compromised the moral standards of their tradition. The betrayal came from within.

Part of Amish culture allows young men between the ages of 16 and 24 to take a few breaks from the strict rules and regulations of their otherwise microscopically legislated lives. The community intentionally schedules events known as 'hoe-downs' as periods of relaxed attitudes. These are unchaperoned events where young people can carouse a bit and experience moments of playful fun before baptism as adults while still remaining within the supposedly safe confines of their community.

It was exactly at that time when nobody was watching, *which means that everyone was trusting*, that the betrayal occurred. Along with the Amish community itself, we are all appalled at the depth of betray this act entailed.

Some of the severest cultural penalties have always been reserved for those who commit the most intimate acts of betrayal. Some form of taboo and punishment against adultery and child abuse, the two greatest forms of personal betray is found in nearly every human civilization. The crime of treason, the ultimate form of communal betrayal, is judged harshly in all cultures. While all of us admit to various short comings and sins of varying degrees, those who fall into these special categories of 'betrayers' are considered among the worst in every culture and at all times.

There is no vitriol like that reserved for a spouse who violated vows and broken the covenant of marriage. How many divorced individuals do you know who can speak fondly of an ex-spouse who left them for another?

There is no revulsion like that reserved for men or women who sexually abuse their own children. Even in the toughest, most violence-filled cell blocks of our prisons, the child molester is seen as the lowest of the low and is often singled out for jail house 'justice' by the other prisoners.

There is no repugnance like that reserved for traitors who betray their country, their homeland; for money, power, or sheer spite. Even in these days of bloodless

civility and bored cynicism, treason remains a crime where even the non-violent ‘white-collar spy’ can be sentenced to death.

There is no greater infamy, no greater insult, than to be branded ‘a Judas’

There was reason early Christians did some things; they left secret signs (the fish) to mark safe places to worship or seek a night’s rest; they wrote secret messages (in the language of their hymns and liturgies) to communicate with other Christians.

It was a dangerous world in which to be a Christian. The political winds of tolerance and intolerance blew hot and cold depending on the whims of the emperor, the mood of the regional rulers, the fanaticism of local officials or the tempers of the marketplace crowds.

But the greatest threat to the small, struggling Christian communities was internal. Early Christians who suffered martyrdom were often turned in by insiders. The names of Christians were given to the officials by these ‘informers’ To make matters worse, these ‘informers’ also coldly recommended what kinds of tests could be given to see whether someone was really a Christian.

Insider-informers knew that a true Christian would 1) never curse Christ, 2) never pray to Roman gods, and 3) never offer wine and incense to the emperor’s statue. If any accused Christian willingly participated in all three of these, he or she was set free because they must not truly be Christian, they must have been falsely accused

Jesus’ words in Luke’ gospel lesson this morning give a chilling message. We can expect to be betrayed and to suffer at the hands of those we know the best and love the most.

Jesus’ words crumble the safe confines of the place we call church. Jesus’ words remind us that some of the harshest criticism, some of the most unpleasant treatment, some of the most hurtful persecution the disciples of Jesus will face is from within our own families, among our closest friends, even from our brothers and sisters in the church.

There is an old saying; “the perversion of the best yields the worst.” Within the body of Christ, we experience the greatest intimacy, the greatest compassion, the greatest encouragement. But it is also within in the body of Christ that we can experience the greatest hurt, the greatest pain, and the greatest betrayal.

As every family knows, you can’t have one without the other. There is a high price to community: it’s called vulnerability.

Surely not in the church, you say. The body of Christ is supposed to be different. We aren’t like the world. We’ve been redeemed.

Our Lord and Savior suffered pain. His disciples betrayed him in one way or another.

This is what is certain in life; the people you love the most will hurt you the most. That is the price of love. The people you love the most are the only ones you really make yourself vulnerable enough to feel the pain.

The church is filled with people like you and me---people struggling to do right, but people are often falling down, failing miserably, messing up.

The only that that is going to save people and save the world is if we forgive and love each other. And then healing can come. It doesn't mean that I have to like everything that you have done. But not to forgive means there are things that I can't forgive about myself for either. Everything is forgivable once one understands why people are the way they are.

In the movie *Good Will Hunting*, Will Hunting is a young man who, although he's an uneducated mathematical savant whose genius exceeds that of the professors of MIT, Will Hunting is anything but good. Instead, he is beset with personnel problems, many of them caused by a childhood home environment of abuse and betrayal. Will goes through therapists like a hot knife through butter until he meets the psychologist played by Robin Williams in the movie. In the breakthrough scene, Will Hunting's therapist get in his face and repeats like mantra the words which for Will Hunting provide healing from the wounds of betrayal and move him toward a new identity: good Will Hunting. The words? "It's not your fault. It's not your fault."

Betrayal is not our fault. We will face betrayal and misunderstanding from all quarters, within and without the faith community. To be betrayed is by definition to be a victim.

But Jesus refuses to let us be victims for long. He advises us not to worry about how we are going to defend ourselves and goes on to promise that not a hair of our heads shall perish and that by our endurance will gain our souls.

Our identities are transformed by presence and power of Christ.

Once betrayed, now blessed.

Once a victim, now victorious.

Once conquered, now conquerors.

Once lost, now found.

Once imprisoned, now set free.

Once weak, now empowered.

With our new identities, we are now able to move beyond betrayal to become empowered agents of blessing to a world still reeling from blows of betrayal and the sting of sin. We can be hunters of good will.