

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday In Lent, March 3, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 281, 164:1, 150, 163:3-6, 163:1-2.

Lessons: Psalm 41, Acts 1:10-22, Matthew 27:1-10.

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:47-56.

. Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last Sunday we saw Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and our text closed with Jesus telling his disciples ***“Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”*** (Matthew 26:45–46, NIV84)

The very next verse tells us ***“While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived.”*** Judas had been one of the 12 men closest to Jesus, chosen as an apostle, one who should have been sent out to proclaim Jesus’ message to the world. Two weeks ago, you heard how ***“Satan entered into him”*** and Jesus told him ***“What you are about to do, do quickly.”*** (John 13:27, NIV84) Now you see that

JUDAS HANDS JESUS OVER TO BE CRUCIFIED

- 1. Judas comes with a large crowd of armed men to capture Jesus.**
- 2. Judas uses a display of love to betray Jesus,**
- 3. And all the disciples deserted Jesus.**

Jesus had told his disciples a number of times that he ***“will be handed over to be crucified.”*** (Matthew 26:1–2, NIV84) Maybe Judas didn’t realize he was really sending Jesus to his death. Could Judas only see the money he had gotten from the priests, and wasn’t thinking much further? That might seem to be the case, because all it meant to Judas at first was money. Matthew tells us ***“one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?’ So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.”*** (Matthew 26:14–16, NIV84)

Judas had agreed to betray Jesus for 30 silver coins, worth about a half-year’s wages. On this night he comes to a quiet place, away from the city, where he knew Jesus and his disciples would likely be going. He brings an armed crowd to betray Jesus in what he thinks will be a secret capture so the leaders of the Jews can quietly take Jesus prisoner and get rid of him in some way, perhaps just throwing him into prison.

He may not even be aware of exactly what they plan to do. After all, Jesus was not the kind of man who was a major troublemaker. Sure, he wasn’t very popular with the leaders of the Jews but why would such a good person – remember, he was sinless and people would likely have noticed he was an upstanding citizen – deserve death? Did Judas maybe think Jesus would receive some prison sentence?

Of course, it doesn’t work out that way. Jesus is tried and executed in a very public way.

How many times had Jesus told his disciples that he would be crucified?

Later Judas realized what he had done. ***“When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’ ‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility.’ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.”*** (Matthew 27:3–5, NIV84)

The large crowd with Judas was ***“armed with swords and clubs.”***

“When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, ‘Lord, should we strike with our swords?’” Jesus’ disciples were ready to fight to keep him safe. But he told them to put their weapons down. But **“one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.”** (Luke 22:49–50, NIV84)

We read in John’s gospel that it was **“Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.)”** (John 18:10, NIV84) Luke tells us that Jesus then **“touched the man’s ear and healed him.”** (Luke 22:51, NIV84)

“At that time Jesus said to the crowd, ‘Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.’”

Jesus had been peaceful in his work. He had been preaching and performing miracles. He had not been protesting the rule of the pagan Romans. He had been speaking out against the priests, teachers, leaders of the Jews and Pharisees and Sadducees who were not teaching and practicing the Word of God in its truth and purity.

We might see his righteous anger at times, as for example the two times he drove the moneychangers and those selling animals out of the temple. But remember that Jesus never sinned.

He makes the point that his mission was teaching, not trying to lead a rebellion.

Today some people make Jesus out to be a rebel, fighting against authority. But he was teaching and preaching in a non-violent way, obeying the Word of God against the Jewish false teachers who were perverting the Word of God.

Notice how Judas had planned to identify the man they should take prisoner. **“Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: ‘The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.’ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed him. Jesus replied, ‘Friend, do what you came for.’**

A kiss! A token of love and affection! Judas wasn’t just going to point out Jesus in the crowd, but he was going to approach him with an action that should show love! Oh, the hypocrisy!

Did Judas think that he could pass off his betrayal as a good thing? Did he think that he could show his affection and appreciation and love for Jesus while betraying him? Isn’t this just about the ultimate in hypocrisy? How terrible that Judas pretended to be something he was not – a friend of Jesus. Jesus even calls him **“friend”**, giving him an opportunity to repent and believe in the forgiveness of sins. But Judas’ kiss was hypocrisy, and he continued with his betrayal of Jesus.

Doesn’t hypocrisy sneak into our lives, too? We claim to be, we appear to be, God-loving Christians who love our fellow men. We like to appear to be nice people, even great people. We like to put on a show so that people may see how religious and pious we are. But God knows our hearts. God sees what we are really like, even if we can hide it from our fellow humans! For our hypocrisy we repent and ask God’s forgiveness.

Judas even gives Jesus a special, personal greeting, calling him **“Rabbi!”**. In this way he publicly claims to honor Jesus as a great teacher.

The armed men had been **“sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.”** The ones who should have honored Jesus as the Messiah, the one whom their religion had been looking forward to, are the very ones who sent men to have him captured and taken prisoner.

Their goal is plain: they want to kill him, and they wanted to do it quietly, not during the Passover feast. But their plan to execute Jesus wouldn’t be done privately. Jesus makes it clear that things must be done exactly according to Scripture.

After Peter had used his sword to cut off Malchus’ ear, we read **“‘Put your sword back in its place,’ Jesus said to him, ‘for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?’”**

Earthly weapons have no place in trying to save Jesus’ life. He reminds his disciples – and all who could hear his words – that he could call on angels to save him. He says “12 legions” of angels! A legion of the Roman army would have been anywhere from 3000 to 6000 soldiers! Jesus could have used his divine power calling upon thousands and thousands of angels to save himself. But **“Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’”** (John 18:11, NIV84)

We must also remember Jesus' words when he told his disciples to put their swords away, ***“for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”*** Violence is not to be the way of the Christian!

Especially in these last hours of his life, Jesus was concerned about the Scriptures and fulfilled them. He said ***“But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.”*** (Matthew 26:56, NIV84)

And then his disciples abandoned him. ***“Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.”***

This is exactly what happened, despite what all the disciples with him that night in the upper room said.

This included Peter who had said he would never deny him, and all the others who also said the same thing.

Jesus had said to his disciples just hours earlier ***“This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.’ Peter replied, ‘Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.’ But Peter declared, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the other disciples said the same.”*** (Matthew 26:31–35, NIV84)

Not only did Peter, later that night deny Jesus three times, but now he and all the rest ran away when Jesus was taken prisoner. They all had said that even if they had to die with Jesus, they would never disown him. But that is exactly what they all did on this night.

We must come back to what Jesus said, that the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Everything that the Old Testament foretold about Jesus, including his capture, his suffering, and his death must come true, exactly as prophesied. He fulfilled the Scriptures for us, that we might be saved eternally because of his obedience.

And that's the way it happened. But remember the reason it all happened. It all leads up to Jesus' resurrection from the dead on the third day. And in that we find joy and comfort. Yes, it is a sad, terrible night for Jesus. But it leads to an eternity of blessing for all who believe in him. He did this for all mankind. And our joy is that ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.”*** (Mark 16:16, NIV84)

And so, as we look at an especially sad time in the life of our Savior, we look forward to the eternal blessings he earned for us in this way. Lord, preserve us unto the eternal life Jesus earned for us! Amen.