

GOOD FRIDAY
Luke 22:39-23:56 (The Betrayal)

On a Thursday evening, in the last week of his life Jesus was on the road again with his disciples. In the peaceful darkness that surrounded them, they began climbing a gently sloping hill. Finally, arriving at the edge of an olive orchard, Jesus asked his disciples to remain there while he went ahead, taking with him, the inner three, Peter, James, and John. Together the four men climbed a little farther up the side of the hill.

The inner three were special friends. Peter had sworn an oath never to deny Jesus, no matter who else did and no matter what should happen. James and John had made a bold claim, declaring that they would share with Jesus whatever life might bring him, anywhere, anytime. These three seemingly loyal friends, were obviously the ones to be with Jesus when he most needed the support of faithful and dependable companions.

Jesus was distressed and deeply troubled. He wanted to share his personal grief, his insufferable burden with them. As he sought relief from his terrible anguish, all that he asked of his three friends was their watchful presence as he prayed. He wanted them to be there for him in his great hour of need. He wanted to know that they were nearby while he wrestled with his agonizing decision in solitude.

The road before him seemed obvious - a path that could only lead to death. Jesus went to pray for deliverance from the necessity to drink from the cup of suffering that lay before him. He prayed that if possible, some other acceptable way might be found to fulfill God's great plan. The depth of his despair is heard in the words of his plea, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me;" And as he finished uttering his prayer, he turned to God in obedience and trust. "Yet not what I want," he said "but what you want!"

Decision-making is a lonely burden. In the midst of his tormented indecision he naturally turned to his friends for support. And there they were - sound asleep! Tired after all the commotion and excitement of that long day, they just couldn't stay awake.

Jesus' three devoted followers did not refuse his request to stay awake and wait, but in reality, they were apathetic to Jesus' plea, and completely unaware of what was actually required of them. And as they slept during this time of impending crisis, they demonstrated their unfaithfulness to the bold promises that had been made: promises of loyalty, promises to participate in whatever might befall their beloved Master.

Three times Jesus came to his disciples for support and encouragement, and each of three times he found them asleep, leaving Jesus alone - alone to anguish over what was about to happen - alone during those last agonizing moments as he awaited the inevitable. And as he was resigning himself to the inescapable, to his ultimate death, his disciples slept, totally oblivious to it all. And all the while, his vigilant enemies were on the move, drawing closer and closer.

During that same evening, in the darkness, near midnight, Judas arrived quietly in the dark garden with an armed mob. There was no warning of their arrival. The followers who had been left on watch were fast asleep as Judas entered the garden in the guise of a disciple. And with the greeting of a disciple, he marked out his Master for the arrest. Despite the protection of numbers, those who came to arrest Jesus, had lacked the courage to do so by daylight in the temple. Their bravery after dark, re-enforced by the participation of a paid guide, was nothing but an empty cowardly charade.

He was arrested by his own people and betrayed by his closest friends and his disciples - all of whom had sworn loyalty to him until death. But, upon awakening and seeing the armed mob, they did not hesitate to flee for their lives, without waiting to see what would happen to their friend.

Jesus was betrayed not only by the disciple who earlier in the evening, had gone his own way only to return with the armed mob, but also by the disciples closest to him. Betrayed and abandoned, he stood in the face of his enemies. The bitterness of betrayal was a significant part of his passion. It has even been suggested that what took place in the orchard that night was more painful than all that took place before noon the next day! In Mark's version of the Passion, there is a profound meaning to words: "All of them deserted him and fled." They left him alone!

Jesus had not only been betrayed by Judas, but by all the other disciples, every single one of them! How painful that must have been! His heart must have been shattered - his spirit crushed! Here he was, facing the most difficult moment of his human life - **abandoned** by the people he loved, the people he counted on, the people he hoped would remain by his side.

They weren't just disciples - they were friends - companions who had shared three years of their life with him - their joys, their sorrows, their possessions and their many meals together - friends who had promised to stay by his side to the end - no matter what would happen. Oh the pain of the betrayal! The pain of being forsaken and forgotten! The pain of being human! If only just one of them had remained by his side!

Peter, James and John certainly did not grasp the implication of the empty, broken, promises they had made so readily. They did not understand the pain of their betrayal. When faced with danger, they did not hesitate to flee - putting their own safety ahead of their loyalty and love for their friend and Master. Betrayal and abandonment was all they had to offer as they left Jesus alone to realize his destiny.

In the courtyard of the High Priest, as Jesus was being interrogated, Peter, the only one who had secretly followed him that far, when questioned - denied all knowledge of him. Now completely deserted, Jesus was left all alone to face what was to come. The religious leaders of his own people accused him before a Roman official they all hated. While charges were being shouted back and forth around him, Jesus maintained a dignified silence.

Condemned to death by a man who feared public pressure, he was beaten so badly he

needed help to carry his cross-beam. A stranger carried it for there was no friend nearby to do so. And two strangers were put to death with him, for the friends who had made the promises were not there to keep them. We are provided with a very poignant picture of Jesus at this point;

- betrayed by a man he had called and trusted
- deserted by every one of his disciples
- falsely accused by his own people
- ridiculed by complete strangers and in the end,
- betrayed and abandoned to face his destiny alone.

As he hung there on the cross, darkness came, the kind of darkness that appeared at great events in ancient history. The "darkness at noon," that accompanied the death of Jesus was an event that affected the future of the whole world - for all time. When it was over, he cried out to God in words that have been remembered for all time. They came, as the climax of his experience - of being betrayed, deserted and abandoned by humankind! "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" This was the final abandonment! At this point Jesus was totally forsaken and completely alone! The cup of suffering had been drained, to the very last drop!

The loneliness of Jesus' suffering is a loneliness his people have always known. Pain brings with it a particular loneliness, an emptiness that cannot be shared, a void that can only be borne alone. This void, this absence of God is an experience that means something only to those who have at some time known, the presence of God. The presence of God is still a reality, if, in the midst of feeling completely forsaken, we are able to cry out as Jesus did, "My God!"

And, when all our resources have been exhausted and every experience denies the presence of God, those who believe, somehow, somewhere, find the strength to search for God. The presence of God is real at all times, and even in terrible places, in the loneliness of our souls, in the dark tormented places of our minds, in the face of death. There may be times when we cannot bear to think of God at all, or even if we are able, only to rail at God and against God, to question God. In our forsakeness, we too cry out as the psalmist did: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

Alone and forsaken, searching for God's presence, Jesus died "with a loud cry." He died violently! He died betrayed and abandoned! The final hour, the end of time, it was all over. Who then was the One who died? Who was the One who died as a result of the treachery of Judas, as a consequence of the betrayal of the disciples, as a sequel to the denial by Peter, as a result of the conspiracy of his own people?

He was a Jewish son of Galilee. He was a son of Mary. He was a teacher of great wisdom and charisma, a healer known for his compassion, a young prophet, a true spokesman for God. And he was more than all of those things. He **was**, the Son of God.

And when the Son of God is betrayed it is always his followers who do it. It is you and it is I who betray him. Sometimes we betray him in the quiet of our hearts, when our love for him

dies for lack of loving. Sometimes we betray him when we are too frightened to stand for what is Christian, or to stand against what is dehumanizing in the world. It is easy to identify the inhumanity of active participation in events such as government-led mass genocides. But, it's the dehumanizing atrocities that passively slip in - little-by-little - almost unnoticed that should worry us the most.

All too often, we allow them to slip with comments such as; "Well, that's the way society is going," or "It's gonna happen anyway - whether we agree with it or not." "It doesn't affect me." Yet, when we stand by, and allow these horrors to happen - we ultimately betray Jesus. And just what are these dehumanizing transgressions?

We betray Christ everyday by the lives we live and by the societies we create. We betray Christ when we look the other way and let atrocities happen. We betray Christ when we forget to love one another and to show compassion toward each other.

Instead of crying, "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?" perhaps our cry should be, **"My God, My God, forgive me, for I have forsaken you!"**