

**Luke 22:47-48 + Are You Betraying the Son of Man with a Kiss? + Series: Cross Examination<sup>1</sup>**  
**Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + Lenten Midweek #4 + 7 March 2018**

Who would make your list of the worst villains in human history? Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, or Pol Pot—all responsible for the death of millions of people? How about the Roman emperor Nero, who used crucified Christians as tiki torches for his garden parties? Or Rasputin—the Russian spiritualist whose influence led to the downfall of the Romanov dynasty while defying nearly every attempt to put him to death? Or Osama bin-Laden—the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks on the United States, not to mention other wars and rumors of wars?

How about Judas Iscariot—the disciple of Christ, who followed Jesus for three years, did the work of an apostle, and even handled their finances, but whose betrayal of Jesus led to the death of the Savior the world? While we might consider Judas to be one of the greatest villains of all time for betraying our Lord, his story is actually quite tragic, more tragic than any movie could depict. His fall from grace as an apostle of Christ to the lowest depths of hell at the end of a rope is truly tragic, and we're tempted to turn our eyes away from such a sad story. Yet tonight, Jesus asks Judas an important question that moves us to search our own hearts filled with sin, while also seeing Christ's heart filled with love for sinners like us.

Tonight we find Jesus in the midst of our Passion History reading (Mark 14:43-65). As Jesus speaks to his sleepy disciples in Gethsemane, a group of Jewish leaders, temple guards, and Roman soldiers arrive armed to the teeth. As soon as he sees Jesus, Judas rushes forward, greets him, and gives him a kiss of greeting on the cheek. It was and still is a pretty common greeting in the Middle East, so it didn't seem all that unusual. Yet our all-knowing Lord was not deceived. He knew what was in Judas' heart. So he asked a heart-piercing question. ***“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”*** Jesus knew that the kiss was a signal for his arrest.

Yet that question did more than reveal Jesus' all-knowing power. That question was also an appeal for Judas to search his own heart. With that question, Jesus pleaded with Judas one last time to repent, to turn from his sins and live. You would think that that question would've cut Judas to the heart, that it would've brought him to his knees in repentance, but Satan had so blinded him that Judas never even stopped to think. The Savior's call was ignored.

In Jerusalem, on the path from the top of the Mount of Olives down to the Garden of Gethsemane, you'll find a pillar that commemorates Judas' kiss. There's not much to the pillar, but it's a reminder of what happened in Gethsemane so many centuries ago. The passing pilgrim is not encouraged to kiss the pillar, but instead to spit on it, to spit on the memory of the villain Judas. In a similar way, we're tempted to do the same anytime we think of Judas, but we need to ask ourselves the Lord's question and search our own hearts. ***“Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”*** Do we hide an unbelieving heart behind a friendly face? Are we guilty of the same kind of shameful hypocrisy?

Before we get offended by even the possibility of being compared to Judas, of actually being a hypocrite like Judas, consider this. Judas was a disciple of Christ. At some point, he had been a believer. Along with the other apostles, he had carried out similar work preaching the gospel and healing the sick when Jesus sent them on short mission trips. Along with them, he sat at Jesus' feet listening to the very words of God from the Word of God himself for three years. He too observed Jesus' miracles and ministry. He had every reason to follow Jesus like the other apostles.

Now you might think to yourself, “I've attended church for years. I've been baptized. I've learned the Word of God. I've been with Jesus most of my life, but I know better! In fact, I am better! I'm not like those people who drink too much or get addicted to opioids or abuse or neglect their kids or commit terrible crimes.” But Judas wasn't any of those things either. He wasn't a terrible criminal or an abuser or an addict. The truth is, his problems started with nothing more than a little greed. Remember how Judas was in charge of the disciples' finances. Well, Judas also used to help himself to what was in there.

A little here, a little there. Nobody noticed...or so he thought, but that seed of greed began to grow in Judas' heart. Like a soul-killing weed, that greed robbed him of joy in anything other than getting more money for himself. Before too long he was meeting in the dark with the enemies of Christ, asking, ***“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?”*** (Matthew 26:15) You see, Judas didn't wake up one day and decide to betray the Lord. That sin was the end result of a series of little sins that were allowed to keep growing in his heart, until greed choked the life out of Judas' soul.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a 2004 Lenten sermon series produced by Northwestern Publishing House.

That's why we need to search our own hearts. Are we betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? Are we hiding an unloving heart behind a friendly Christian exterior? Are the lips we use to praise the Savior used to speak profanity when we leave his house? Are the hands we fold in prayer later turned into instruments of wickedness? Do the ears that listen to God's Word here listen for the latest gossip? Are the eyes focused on Christ here later focused on smut and filth elsewhere?

Hypocrisy can so easily sneak into our lives, making us as responsible as Judas for Christ's death. What right do we have to spit on the memory of Judas when we practically betray the Son of Man with our own hypocrisy? Jesus' question pierces our souls, but it also reveals the Savior's heart of love.

Why did Jesus ask Judas that question in the first place? He knew what Judas was doing. Judas knew what he was doing, but Jesus had an important reason for asking that question. Even as Judas was betraying Jesus to his enemies, even as Judas was IDing Jesus for arrest, Jesus still cared about Judas' soul. Jesus cared about Judas' eternity. He wanted Judas to repent and live!

The Savior had tried on several occasions to call Judas to repentance. And in that heart-piercing question, we see the loving heart of the Savior once more. Here was a disciple whose heart had become so cold and so filled with hate that he handed Jesus over to die while pretending to show his love with a kiss. Yet our Savior still loved even such a miserable excuse for a disciple. Our Savior longed to bring Judas to repentance.

That's why Jesus asks whether we are betraying the Son of Man with a kiss, whether we are hiding hearts that are loveless towards him behind a friendly appearance. As painful as that question is and as painful as the answer can be, remember that our Savior wants to save every one of us! What amazing love! Even though our Savior knows what's in our hearts, he still loves us anyway. He still shows that love by laying down his life for us.

Now as you ponder Christ's question, "***Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?***", remember that no matter how shocking your sins might be, Jesus still loves you and cleanse you with his blood. No matter how far you stray, no matter how long you've been gone, the Savior's arms are still open. "***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.***" (Matthew 11:28) Our Lord will never treat us coldly or turn us away, for he says, "***Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.***" (John 6:37)

When you see the cold hypocrisy that lives in your heart, don't give in to despair like Judas, thinking that God can't possibly forgive your sin. Instead, confess your sins to the Lord and trust in God's promise of forgiveness. "***Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.***" (Isaiah 1:18) You can trust his promise, "***As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.***" (Psalm 103:11-12) In Christ, God has done exactly that for you, for me, for every one of us!

With our Lord's searching question, "***Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?***", we can and will repent of our sins and put our trust and confidence in his forgiveness that he bought with his own blood. That loving heart of Christ is our refuge from sin and guilt and death. That love will move us to truly and sincerely love our Lord not just in words, but in all our lives. Amen.