

**Mark 14:12-26 + Surely Not I, Lord? + Series: Cross Examination<sup>1</sup>**  
**Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + Holy Thursday + 29 March 2018**

It's a scene played out in courtrooms and living rooms every day. An accusation is made, and the accused reacts with shock and disbelief. You see it in courtroom dramas. You see it in exclusive interviews. You see it throughout the 24-hour news cycle. Shock and disbelief at an accusation, because everyone is innocent—or so they contend.

Maybe you've even seen it in your own home. The accused is one of your kids or even your spouse. You could cut the tension in the air with a knife. The charge is leveled. The finger of blame gets pointed, and the response is predictable. "Are you serious?!?" "You said I did what?!?" "...But...but...but she did this first!" "He did that!" "It's not my fault!"

Sadly, most of the time all that shock and drama and disbelief prove to be nothing more than a lie. The accused really was guilty despite their protests. In this day and age, we tend to be more skeptical than trusting. We tend to operate with an attitude of guilty until proven innocent... So you can understand if we hear the disciples' question, "**Surely not I, Lord?**" and think the disciples are just covering their real guilt. Yet before we jump on the disciples for their emotional response, consider the source of their question and the response they received from Christ that first Holy Thursday night.

Jesus and his disciples had gathered to eat the Passover meal in a borrowed upper room in Jerusalem. During the meal, Jesus made an announcement that left his disciples stunned. "**I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.**" Now this wasn't the first time Jesus had talked about his betrayal. Already early in his ministry, Jesus had stated, "**One of you is a devil!**" (John 6:70) The Apostle John later added that Jesus was referring to Judas, which none of the disciples could've known. In his final months, Jesus had mentioned on several occasions that he would be betrayed. Earlier that evening as Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he said, "**You are clean, though not every one of you.**" (John 13:10) Jesus knew that Judas Iscariot planned to betray him. So with cryptic language, Jesus tried to lead Judas to repent. Finally, Jesus got more direct. "**I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.**"

How did the disciples react? Did they start preparing a defense against the charge? Did they start pointing the finger of blame at one of their fellow disciples? Did they try to hide in the shadows and remain unnoticed?

No! They were filled with sadness and genuine shock. Who could do such a thing against their Teacher? Who could share a meal with Jesus, then turn around and hand him over to his enemies? They could hardly believe what they heard, but they still believed Jesus. In fact, rather than accuse their fellow disciples, each disciple pointed his finger at himself. "**Surely not I, Lord?!?** Could it be me? Could I dare to do such a thing to you, Lord?"

The matter was personal. The question they asked hoped that the answer would be "no," but each of those disciples knew in his heart of hearts that the answer could be "yes." Each disciple knew he could be capable of even betraying his own Lord. That's why each one pleaded, "**Surely not I, Lord?**"

The Lord once said through his Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (17:9), "**The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?**" As each disciple examined his own heart, he recalled the sinful pride that had led them to argue over who was the greatest among them. Each disciple recalled the fear and doubt that storms at sea and tests of faith once stirred in his heart. Each disciple saw in his heart foolishness, weakness, and doubt. Each disciple realized they were capable of any sin.

With a troubled heart, each disciple yearned to receive Christ's reassurance that he would not betray his Lord. None of them assumed that they could never be guilty of such a crime. So they humbly asked, "**Surely not I, Lord?**"

What about you? As the Lord warned his disciples so long ago, so also he warns us throughout his Word. For example, Jesus warned about the days leading up to his return, "**Many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other...Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.**" (Matthew 24:10,12) The Apostle Paul warned that people would be "**lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving,**

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<sup>1</sup> This series was adapted from a 2004 Lenten sermon series published by Northwestern Publishing House.

***slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power.***” (2 Timothy 3:2-5)

We hear such warnings and the question bubbles up from deep in our hearts, ***“Surely not I, Lord?”*** Could any of us actually allow our love to grow cold or actually fall away from the faith or actually love anyone or anything more than God or actually commit some other sin? The truth is, any Christian is capable of committing any sin. Just think about the thoughts that have crossed your mind that were never acted upon. Like the disciples, it troubles us to think that we could be guilty of such sins. You could arrogantly dismiss such warnings, but consider the Apostle Paul’s warning, ***“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”*** (1 Corinthians 10:12) We need to ask, ***“Surely not I, Lord?”***

Rather than point the finger of blame at someone else, we need to search our own hearts. Like those disciples, we then see how guilty we have been and how awful we could be. ***“Surely not I, Lord?”*** Such a question comes from a troubled heart, but Jesus has an answer.

How does the Lord react to troubled hearts? He simply told his disciples, ***“It is one of the Twelve...one who dips bread into the bowl with me.”*** Since we know the rest of the story, that might seem like an obvious response to us, but the truth is, every one of the disciples had dipped bread into the bowl of sauce with Jesus.

Again, in his own perfect-love way, Jesus hoped to lead Judas to repent of the wickedness he had planned. In fact, Jesus had a harsher warning. ***“The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”*** Yet Judas still failed to repent. His heart had grown so hard to Jesus warnings that when he repeated the same question that the other Eleven had asked, Jesus told him, ***“Yes, it is you.”***

...But what about the others? What about their worried hearts? What about their anxious questions? Did Jesus simply leave them troubled with doubt and fear? Of course, not! Jesus knows how weakness and worry can trouble his people.. So instead of abandoning them to their fears, Jesus gave them the greatest reassurance of all. He gave them himself. ***“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many...’***

Jesus comforted their troubled hearts with his Holy Supper. To hearts filled with the fear of sin and its punishment, to hearts troubled with the knowledge of weakness and foolishness, Jesus spoke comfort with his own body and blood. That same body and blood would soon be given and poured out for the forgiveness of all their sins.

Jesus didn’t give the Eleven false comfort, telling them that they had nothing to worry about. No, they had plenty to worry about! One would deny any knowledge of his Savior. The others would abandon their Savior in his hour of need. The Lord didn’t tell them, “It isn’t you.” Instead, knowing their weakness and sin, he gave them his body and blood—to assure them of his pardon for their sin and to strengthen them in their weakness.

In the same way, when the Lord’s warnings lead you to search your heart, when that examination reveals your weakness and sin, when you know the honest answer to your painful question is “Yes, it is you,” then remember again how Jesus responded to his disciples. Remember how he quieted their fears, how he calmed their worried hearts. Remember and rejoice that he has preserved his promises of forgiveness and life and peace in his Holy Supper.

Rejoice as you come to the Lord’s Table with your worried and anxious heart and receive his body and blood with bread and wine. Rejoice as you hear these words of promise, ***“Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”*** Rejoice because the Lord’s answer to your troubled hearts is himself—the very body and blood of the Prince of Peace! Such peace he promised to his troubled disciples and to us that first Holy Thursday evening.

Yes, the question ***“Surely not I, Lord?”*** comes from troubled hearts. Such a question comes when we are troubled by the knowledge of our own weakness and sin. So as you come to the Lord’s Table tonight, bring your heart troubled by the burdens of sin and weakness and guilt, but leave those burdens there. Jesus has provided the best answer for your troubled heart. Through him, you will always find comfort, pardon, and peace. Amen.