

SERMON: Broken and Betrayed

TEXT: Luke 22:1-8, 14-25

I never knew my Nana Gurnon. My dad's family lived in Boston, while we lived in St. Paul, Minnesota, so we didn't know that side of the family very well. I was also the youngest of all their grandchildren, and Nana died when I was just four years old. But the stories I've heard about Nana indicate that she was a formidable woman, very stern, and not very warm and fuzzy. It seemed that she was the ruler of the house when my dad was growing up, and she was very strict.

I noticed once that my dad was a very fast eater, and I asked him about it because I worried that it was an unhealthy habit. He explained that he learned to eat fast as a child. His mother decided when every meal was over, and she would begin clearing the plates off the table whether you had finished eating or not. If you were still lifting the fork to your mouth, she would take the plate right out from under you.

Then there's my sister, who eats very slowly. And she would get very upset if anyone dared get up from the table before she was finished eating. She found it very rude to leave her alone, as mealtime was a family event. But I had things to

do, places to go, people to see, and I became very impatient with her dawdling through her meal.

You can learn a lot about people from watching what goes on around the family table. Studies have shown that mealtime around the table with your family is an important factor in the growth and development of children. It makes a difference not only for the development of healthy eating habits, but also has been shown to improve a child's mood and mental health. Of course, I'm sure the mood of the adults at the table also affects the mood of the children.

We begin this Lenten season with the story of the Last Supper - the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. This scripture begins the time of Jesus' Passion. I wondered for a long time why his final days were referred to as his "passion."

I looked in the index in three different Bibles I have at home, and none of them included the word *passion*. So, it's not a word that we get from the scriptures. But it refers to the suffering of Jesus. It also makes me think about how we might approach life if we knew we only had a few days to live.

I think most of us would live *passionately*, if you will. We would certainly want to surround ourselves with those we love the most. And we would want to show them and tell them how important they are to us. We might want to recount all the wonderful times we shared together. We might want to go somewhere we always wanted to go, or try something we always dreamed of. We would want every word we spoke and every act we did to be important and meaningful - for others as well as for ourselves. Much of this time with loved ones might take place around the family table.

Even while he faced great suffering, Jesus certainly lived his last days with great Passion and great purpose. Beginning with the Passover meal around the table in the upper room with his disciples. “When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, *‘I have eagerly [passionately] desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’*”

Those who had followed him for three years; those who had listened to his teachings and learned from him; those who had experienced his miracles; who had prayed with him in the dark of night and on stormy seas; those who still didn’t understand him, and even those who disagreed with him were all at the table. Yes,

even Judas, his betrayer. As the Psalmist wrote, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” (Psalm 23:5)

Of course, we all know about Judas. Or we know everything we think we *need to know* about him. Judas was presumably one of Jesus’ friends. But he sold him out for thirty lousy pieces of silver. And I use the word *lousy* because this really wasn’t much money at all. We’re talking under ten dollars. It was a lousy amount of money, even for that time. One scholar wrote that Judas could have extorted so much more than this if money was truly his motive. So, what was it then? Why, Judas?

Christian musician, Michael Card, sought to answer that question and others in a song called, *Why*.

Why did it have to be a friend who chose to betray the Lord?

And why did he use a kiss to show them?; that's not what a kiss is for.

Only a friend can betray a friend; a stranger has nothing to gain.

And only a friend comes close enough to ever cause so much pain.

But there’s more to know about Judas. And I think it’s important for us to acknowledge that - at least in the beginning - he was a good person. Or, at least as

good as the other disciples. After all, Jesus chose him. Although you might argue that Jesus knew from the start that he would be betrayed by a friend, so perhaps he chose Judas for that very purpose.

Biblical scholars have speculated that perhaps Judas was trying to force Jesus to make the declaration for himself, that he was the Messiah. They say that Judas had high hopes and was himself *passionate* about the Messianic prophecy. But he obviously misunderstood the work of the Messiah, and we must remember that he was not alone in his misunderstanding. Perhaps Judas had become disillusioned and disappointed, and his impatience got the best of him.

Was Judas possessed by Satan as Luke wrote in the beginning of today's passage? Or did his passion overshadow his true purpose?

With all these questions you might also be wondering why I am taking up for Judas. Why am I giving him the benefit of the doubt?

Well, I think we need to recognize that any one of us could be him. I learned in my study that Judas was the only disciple who was *not* from Galilee. He was from southern Judea, which made him the *odd man out*. He didn't belong. And he

was a bit of a loner. Maybe the others didn't understand him. Maybe they didn't make much of an effort to get to know him.

The Passover meal was supposed to be a celebration of freedom. A remembrance of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. But for Jesus, this time around the table with his friends was mixed with his passion for them and the passion - the suffering - that would follow.

As he broke the bread for their meal, his heart was also breaking, knowing that one of those friends at the table with him was about to betray him, to hand him over to those who wanted to be rid of him. As he poured the wine, he knew that it was his own blood that would be spilled soon enough. He was offering himself as the sacrificial lamb for all God's people of all times and places. Jesus was passionate about his purpose in giving his life to save his friends, his brothers and sisters, his family. Even his enemies.

The table is a place of community and commitment, fellowship and faith, nourishment and nurture for our bodies, minds, and spirits. This table is a place of passion and purpose, where we receive and share the love of our Savior and our neighbor... to the glory of God!        AMEN.