

Sermon #1,253: St. John 13:21-32

3-15-17, Lent 2 Midweek, Bethany-Princeton MN

(Hymns: 297, 378.3-4, 293, 575; also Kingo: "Over Kedron Jesus Treadeth")

GOD BEHELD MY WRETCHED STATE

The Text, St. John 13:21-32. ²¹ When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." ²² Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. ²³ Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. ²⁵ Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. ²⁷ Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." ²⁸ But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. ²⁹ For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy those things we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night. ³¹ So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. ³² If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately." Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth.

To whom shall we turn, now that the darkness and the perils of the night surround us, but to You, the Light of our life? O God, open to us Your mild and loving heart in Jesus Christ. Let us rest in Him, our safe refuge and strong fortress, in whom alone we can peacefully lie down to sleep. Our Savior, prevent every hostile power from harming or touching us this night. Keep our bodies pure in chastity and holiness, and, though the body rest, let our soul have its joy and comfort in You, our Life and our Salvation. Bless and defend our family members and friends this night and always, and may they rest peacefully. If we have enemies, bless them also and let their hearts know Your love. Protect our government and all in authority. May Your mercy be great to all and mighty to save for time and eternity. Amen. (ELH p. 171, *Prayer for Friday evening*)

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ who is the Light in this present darkness:

The words that mean the most in these verses are these four words:

“And it was night.” On one hand it doesn’t seem to mean much, because the Passover was always celebrated in the evening. But John does not say these four words in connection with eating the supper. Instead, it’s when he reports that **“having received the peace of bread”** from Jesus – the piece of bread that Jesus said would indicate who was betraying Him – Judas **“then went out immediately.”** Then comes: **“And it was night.”**

These words are about Judas. Just two days before this Jesus had said: *“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness” (Jn 12:46).* So in Jesus’ words, where is it night? In Judas’ soul. He is walking and abiding in darkness. He has left Jesus.

Then Jesus says something that surprises us: **“Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.”** Why is the deepest darkness followed by Jesus’ statement of exultation in the brightest light and glory? Jesus is not exulting in Judas’ darkness, as we shall see. He is looking ahead to the glory of salvation that He is winning for all people. He is telling us that even in the dark scenes ahead – as He suffers cruelly and is crucified – we should see that He is crushing the power of darkness.

But in order to see this we have to look seriously at the darkness. We do not often do this. It’s no fun to do this. In Judas we see a clear picture of what our darkness really is, and where it leads.

First we hear: **“Satan entered into him.”** How awful! This is the second time we hear this in the Passion History. First we hear in Luke – prior to eating the Last Supper – that *“then Satan entered into Judas,”* and *“he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray [Jesus] to them” (Lk 22:3-4).* Now, after the Last Supper – in fact, after Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper and Judas was part of it – once again we hear that the prince of darkness, Satan, entered into Judas.

Why, at two different points, does it say Satan entered into Judas? I think because when Judas is in Jesus’ presence – and Jesus is still reaching out to him – Satan has to double his efforts. Jesus’ persistent, patient friendship offered to sinners is a threat to Satan’s keeping them!

We know where this leads. Judas came leading an armed guard to Gethsemane, greeted Jesus with a hypocritical kiss, and they seized Jesus, bound Him, and led Him away to Caiaphas. That is sad enough, this returning Jesus' patient love with a cold shoulder. There is no love in Judas' heart for Jesus. But then it turns worse. The darkness gets deeper.

Next Wednesday's Passion reading tells how Judas, who followed in the shadows, became distraught at how it turned out and because of his own part in it. He went back to the priests and told them he had sinned. He found that they didn't care, they were not his friends. He threw down the money but could find no rest for his soul, no peace for his conscience. He then did the ultimate harm to himself: killed himself, hanged himself from a tree before His Master died on the tree of the cross. The hatred he held for Jesus, he turned onto himself. What he did to himself was the ultimate harm because he left himself without a Savior.

This is the worst darkness! We sang about that: *"Grief drove me to despair, and I had nothing left me but to die; to hell I fast was sinking"* (ELH 378 v. 3).

We might feel bad for Judas. But what's important is to learn from his example, and remember that Judas got there by steps. It started small. Perhaps it was a desire for money, or he coveted power, or he was frustrated with Jesus' spiritual kingdom, or he grew impatient with the other disciples, or he despised or looked down on other people, or he felt slighted by others and allowed himself to feel resentment and let it grow. What is it for you? Recognize that these "small" sins are darkness too. Also, I think we can safely assume that Judas was self-focused, looking inward, which is where despair really begins.

We can psychologize this to death. But that isn't the point. We are seeing what our darkness looks like, who is behind it, what its end is. The worst darkness is that Judas thought there was no forgiveness for him. This was Satan's goal. To drive him where there is no Jesus. That's the true darkness. When you're only looking at yourself and at your sins, drowning in self-pity, it's because you're in a place where there is no Jesus.

"But God beheld my wretched state," we sang. That's what this is about. God sees this wretched darkness in which all people naturally dwell. It is His fervent desire to bring everyone out of darkness into His light.

*A Father's heart He turned to me,
Sought my redemption fervently;
He gave His dearest Treasure.*

This is why, when Judas went out, Jesus said: **“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him.”** Jesus was not exulting in Judas’ darkness. He hates the darkness.

But Jesus proved His love for Judas, you and all people by His willingness to be seized and arrested, made captive, and condemned to die. Judas’ betrayal is part of this salvation. The only way that God could overcome the darkness of sin, death, unbelief and hell, was for Jesus to go into it Himself. Because Jesus went into the dark valley of shadow, allowed Himself to be covered by clouds of despair, but never yielded to temptation, never gave up or gave into the darkness, and suffered all for Judas, for Peter, for you, for everyone – now He gives you His victory.

It’s a lie of the devil to convince people they’ve been driven into darkness. Instead of being self-focused and drawn inward, Jesus is the object of our faith, His cross is where we look, His Word is spoken from the outside to *“call you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1Pe 2:9).*

Jesus and His light have come into the world, that is, to every person. If it is frightening to hear that Satan comes into a person, then the antidote is that Jesus, in His Word, in Baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper, actually comes into a person – into you!

If He, the Light, is in you then there is no darkness in you at all! Jesus has come to your place, wherever you are. He shared whatever you suffer from sin and Satan. He triumphed over it and He gives the victory to you. God *“gave His dearest Treasure”* – Jesus – to you! Amen!