

April 22, 2011

Good Friday

Matthew 26:36-56

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

The Rev'd Elizabeth Shows Caffey, associate rector

Judas is not alone. He does not bear sole responsibility for what happened to Jesus. Jesus is betrayed by all his disciples. His disciples, the people who have promised to follow him and support him have failed him. It starts in the garden, Peter and the sons of Zebedee abandon Jesus when he is struggling, when he needs their prayers and support. They allow their fatigue to overcome them, they succumb to sleep. Then Judas, obviously, betrays Jesus to the authorities. But here's the kicker, here is where no one gets off the hook - the gospel closes with these words, "Then all the disciples deserted him and fled."

It has been my experience in life that it's not so much the lure of the evil one seeking to pull us into the darkness that hurts us, but rather the betrayal of a beloved, a friend, a person whom you have allowed yourself to be vulnerable with, a person you have come to depend upon. These betrayals cut the deepest, cause unexpected and unbelievable harm, and also usually bring with them a ripple effect of pain. True betrayal does not come from the evil one lurking around, but the trusted beloved.

Jesus is there - swimming in that deep, abiding pain of betrayal. Throughout his ministry, he has gathered around him disciples, his trusted friends. They have traveled with him far and wide, listened to him proclaim the Good News of God. These disciples have followed his teaching and worked right alongside him. They have shared meals together. They know Jesus intimately. He is their teacher and they are his disciples, his friends, his beloveds. He depends upon them and they depend on him. But the pressure is on, the chief priests are feeling threatened and angry, emotions are running high and tension is in the air. And these very same disciples, his beloved friends, all betray him. They all desert Jesus and flee.

It's hard not to flee ourselves right now, if not physically, at least spiritually and emotionally. It is hard to stay present, stay connected and not separate ourselves from this story - to only hear with our ears and not with our hearts and our minds. Who really wants to go there? It is no fun to delve into the depths of betrayal and admit to our part in the fracture of our relationship with God. Our heart wants to skip ahead, rush through the horrors of our shared history, the pain of this Passion story, to arrive quickly at the joy of Easter morning and the promise of resurrection. It is no fun to wait. It is really no fun to engage in the hard self-examination that the Passion requires of us. But here is where we must remain for a while, here in the discomfort of betrayal, our betrayal.

In our Episcopal tradition, Holy Week is a natural time in the rhythm of the church year when people seek out the little known rite: reconciliation of a penitent. Let me be clear, the corporal confession that we say together each Sunday is perfectly good and

sufficient. However, there may be times in our lives when we hold on tightly to things, holding on to shame, guilt and blame - things we need to ask God's forgiveness for. At these times the opportunity to confess more explicitly, more intimately your sins to God might be helpful for you to both fully experience that brokenness and also allow yourself to confess and accept God's forgiveness. During this sacramental rite, some intentional time is spent delving into the depths of brokenness, admitting aloud to yourself and to God those dark places where you have caused harm, where you have broken relationship. And then after a time of penitence, the rite continues with the penitent asking for God's forgiveness and absolution. My experience, of both partaking of this sacramental rite myself and also journeying with various people through the rite, is that we want to rush through the part where we admit to our failings, our betrayal of right relationship, and move on quickly through penitence to God's absolution. Perhaps it's the guilt that comes with admitting to our own bad and harmful behavior that drives us to want to resolve it quickly, to seek a quick fix. There is no doubt it is challenging to examine our behavior and admit to our acts of betrayal, betrayal in our relationships with our selves, with one another and with God. But in order for us to truly grow into the beautiful fullness of who God created each of us to be, we must sit for a while here with the reality of our acts of betrayal. We must confess to ourselves and ultimately to God the darkness and brokenness for which we are responsible.

We must once again recognize that in the reality that is our lives outside of these four walls, we too, like those disciples so long ago, desert Jesus and flee. We too fail to live into our promises of discipleship. We betray Jesus.