

Passion (Palm) Sunday 2017  
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA  
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They are on opposite sides of the street.

On one side of this street in Rome, you find a statue of St. Peter, the leader of the apostles.

This statue is carved from a massive piece of marble, and Peter stands there with the keys to the kingdom in his left hand. His right hand points to the altar of the Basilica of Saint John in Lateran. It is a magnificent carved image of one of the heroes of our faith.

Across the street, in a smaller building, you find another statue. Just inside the main entrance, on a pedestal to the right, is a statue carved by Ignazio Jacometti.

As you look up at the statue, you see Jesus – his face full of both compassion and maybe a touch of disappointment. And leaning in toward Jesus... is Judas. Judas has one arm reaching toward Jesus, as if to embrace him.

And as you look at the statue from that angle, you realize that Judas is just about to kiss Jesus – it's the moment of betrayal we heard about in the Passion. In the Garden of Gethsemane, it seems that Judas is trying his best to look like a man full of love for Christ.

But, if you step to the right just a bit, you can see Judas' back. And from that angle, you see that Judas is holding the bag of silver coins that he had received for his act of betrayal.

One hand is embracing Jesus, and one hand is hiding the bag of coins behind his back. It really is one of the most powerful statues I've ever encountered.

On one hand, I find that sculpture to be so powerful because it reveals a dynamic

which I struggle with in my own life.

I like to think of myself as someone who is focused on Jesus, committed to Jesus, striving to love Jesus. I reach out to Jesus in prayer, I try to use my hands to serve him as much as possible. I want to embrace Jesus.

So part of *me* looks like that part of Judas on the statue – reaching out to kiss Jesus, trying my best to love and honor him.

But while I *try* to love Christ fully, I know that, sadly, I often have one hand behind my back...

- + trying to hold on to something for myself
- + trying to pretend that I'm not betraying the one I love
- + trying to hide something from the Lord, from others, from myself.

But... the things we try to hide often have control over us. The things we try to keep hidden often wound us the most. As they say in the 12 step addiction programs – “we are only as sick as our secrets.”

So, like that statue, many of us live with tension. We want to embrace, love and follow Christ with our whole heart... but we know that there are still pieces of our lives we try to keep hidden. We try to keep some things hidden in the dark. In what we have done, and what we have failed to do, we betray the Savior.

That's why we need holy week. That's why we need to focus carefully on all of the Gospels we will hear this week.

The Gospels of Holy Week invite us to know and believe the truth, to confess and name our sins. And the Gospels reassure us that it is in the dying and rising of Jesus that we experience the forgiveness of every failure.

In the cross of Jesus, our betrayals are overcome by the mercy of the One who was betrayed. He died to forgive us, and lead us to life.

Have you ever noticed? Again and again, when the scriptures mention Judas, they call him the “Betrayer.” And it is true. He betrayed Jesus. For 30 silver pieces.

But wait a minute. Judas was not the *only* one standing there with Jesus as the crowd came to arrest him. Peter, James and John were there with Jesus. And what does Matthew tell us about ALL of them? He tells us that ALL of them fled. Every last one of them.

Isn't that a kind of betrayal?

And the Passion narrative also tells us that Peter, in the courtyard of Caiaphas, was given three chances to profess his faith in Jesus. But three times, before the cock crows, Peter *denies* Jesus.

Isn't that a kind of betrayal too?

So why is Judas called the “Betrayer,” and Peter is called the “First Pope?” They both betrayed Jesus, each in their own way.

And why is it that Judas gets his statue in Rome, showing the supreme moment of his sin. Yet right across the street, Peter is portrayed with flowing robes, keys, and strength?

The men on *both* sides of that Roman street let Jesus down. The men on *both* sides of that Roman street – Judas and Peter - betrayed our Lord in profound ways.

Yet one is honored, one is called ‘betrayer.’

What's the difference?

Well, Matthew gives us a clue. When Judas finally realizes that he has betrayed his Lord, Judas apparently convinces himself that he can never be forgiven. He concludes that Christ could never love him again. Judas believes that God could never forgive a sinner like him. So Judas takes his own life. He gives up too soon. He gives up on God too soon. He gives up on his own future.

And Peter? Peter knows that he has betrayed the Lord, too. Yet, when he realizes the reality of his betrayal, Peter does not give up quite yet.

Apparently, Peter wonders if God might have another chapter in the story, another chance for Peter to experience forgiveness and hope and life.

So Peter, who had every right to think that Jesus might give up on him, *waits to see*. And on Easter morning, he realizes... something new is possible. Forgiveness can happen. Hope is real. God never gives up on anyone, in any circumstance. God never gives up on our world, in any circumstance.

Like Peter and Judas, we begin Holy Week knowing that we are sinners.

Sometimes, we sin through our actions. Sometimes, we sin through our lack of action. Through our selfishness and self-centeredness, we are sinful and we betray our savior.

But in all of the celebrations of Holy Week, we have the chance to encounter the One who refuses to give up on us.

Peter, the denier, who still found hope. Judas, the betrayer, who lost all hope.

Peter, the sinner, who experienced forgiveness on earth. Judas, the sinner, who died thinking that there was no such thing as forgiveness.

Which side of the street do you want to be on?