

MIDWEEK OF LENT 3: LEADER

Week 4: Week of March 24

THE BETRAYAL

Luke 22:47–53

OPENING

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heav'n, to earth come down!
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter ev'ry trembling heart.

—“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (*LSB* 700, v. 1)

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative (Luke 22:47–53), Luke relates the betrayal of Jesus by Judas and His arrest by the religious leaders. At the heart of this scene is the contrast between the powers of darkness and the eternal love of God.

Jesus summarizes the events at hand when He tells the religious leaders, “this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (v. 53). Yet, even in the darkness, we see the gracious light of Christ. Throughout the betrayal and arrest, Jesus demonstrates the love of God. He willingly bears this suffering as part of God’s work of salvation, and He acts in the midst of this suffering to teach, to protect, and to heal.

Though we see the hour and the power of darkness in this moment, Luke also reveals to us the eternal love of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. In Luke 6:16, Judas is introduced into the narrative as the one “who became a traitor.” Here, Luke records that Jesus asks Judas if he “would betray the Son of Man with a kiss” (22:48). Luke invites the reader to see Judas’s betrayal as one of a series of events, each offering its own form of betrayal to the powers of darkness. Consider each of the scenes in this section of the Passion Narrative and identify the betrayals. Who are the individuals, what has God called them to do in relationship to Christ and His Word, and what are they doing that betrays this calling?

Luke offers us three sections of this narrative based upon different individuals interacting with Jesus. The story begins with Judas handing over Jesus (vv. 47–48), then moves to the disciples’ resisting Jesus’ arrest (vv. 49–51), and then concludes with the opposition of the religious leaders (vv. 52–53).

In each section of the narrative, Luke reveals a form of betrayal as individuals not only fail to do what God has called them to do in their vocations but also work against the ways of God, and thus betray or become a traitor to Jesus and to what God has called them to be in relationship to Him.

With Judas, the irony is sharp and clear. Rather than be a follower, Judas becomes a leader (v. 47) and uses the customary relations of a disciple with his teacher to hand Jesus over to those who desire to kill Him (v. 48).

With the disciples, Luke reveals how they have fundamentally misunderstood Jesus and His mission. His teaching of humble service (22:26), His call to bear the cross and stay with Him in His trials (22:28), His forewarning to be prepared for persecution (22:36–37), and His repeated encouragement to pray (22:40, 46) are all forgotten as the disciples ask a question but fail to wait for an answer and instead define discipleship by a reliance upon force rather than faith (v. 50).

With the religious leaders, Luke highlights their displacement from the things of God. Rather than being found within the temple, attending to the Word and works of God (v. 53), they are in the garden at night, with swords and clubs as their weapons (v. 52).

2. In 2 Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy that “if we are faithless, [Christ] remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself” (2:13). At His birth, the angels revealed Jesus to be the Savior (Luke 2:13), and in His ministry Jesus repeatedly highlighted saving the lost as His mission both in parables (15:1–32) and in direct teaching (19:10).

In this section of the Passion Narrative, how does Jesus demonstrate in word and deed His faithfulness to God’s mission to save those who are lost?

The most important way in which Jesus demonstrates His faithfulness to God’s mission is by willingly suffering this experience of being handed over to the religious leaders for trial and ultimately crucifixion. Jesus has predicted this event throughout Luke (9:21–22, 43–45; 18:31–33), and Jesus could resist this event through His miraculous power (22:51) (as He had passed through such rejection earlier in His ministry, cf. 4:30). Jesus, however, chooses to submit to the will of His Father (22:42) and to suffer to bring about salvation.

In smaller ways, however, we can see the love of God at work in this section. Notice how with Judas and the religious leaders, Jesus seeks to engage them with questions (vv. 48 and 52). While the questions clearly reveal the sins of these people, they also invite self-reflection and the opportunity for repentance. Such is the way Jesus has taught throughout the Gospel, asking questions as a way of leading sinners to repentance.

With the disciples, Jesus acts more directly. Rather than teach through questions, He acts in protection. Jesus prevents further violence (v. 51), lest their actions substantiate claims that He was leading a rebellion (23:1) and bring them under arrest. In addition, Jesus miraculously heals the servant of the high priest whose ear had been cut off by the sword (22:51). To the end, Jesus demonstrates His love, using His power to teach, to protect, and even to heal others rather than Himself.

3. Lent is a time for repentant reflection. As we meditate on this text, Luke invites us to consider the powers of darkness in our own lives. What tempts you to betray the work God has called you in vocation to do?

Vocation: any rule in which you can serve God and love His children. This can be as a parent loving your children, a child respecting elders, an employee working to feed the family, a farmer working God’s Earth and preparing food for humans to eat, or any other type or job or relationship.

In Baptism, God has made us His children and brought us into His kingdom. As members of His household, we have various vocations in which we can manifest our love toward Him and faithful service toward others. Unfortunately, the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh fight against such service. In this Lenten exercise, we can name the ways in which we struggle with the powers of darkness. (continued on next page)

In leading the group through this section, you might consider reading through the Table of Duties in the catechism and naming the ways in which these actions are a struggle for Christians today.

4. In the face of such sin, Luke reminds us of the mission of Jesus: to seek and to save the lost. How is Jesus still engaged in that mission in this place?

In this text, Luke helps us see how, in the face of the powers of darkness, Jesus continues to love with an eternal love, teaching, protecting, and healing. This work of Jesus continues in our midst through the public proclamation of His Word, through the Sacraments, through private Confession and Absolution, and through the mutual consolation of the saints.

CONCLUSION

In Psalm 136, Israel learned to sing of God's enduring love in a responsive song. The first voice declared a work of God and then the second voice responded with the refrain, "for His steadfast love endures forever." So Israel praised God for the wonder of creation, remembering His steadfast love.

In this text, Luke helps Christians continue to sing that song. Faced with the powers of darkness, Christ responded with an eternal love. In repentance, we come before God confessing the ways we have betrayed His calling in our lives, and yet, even now, because of the willing suffering and death of Jesus Christ, God proclaims us forgiven, "for His steadfast love endures forever."

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, in Your eternal love for us, You sent Your Son into this world, to save us from our sin. In Him, you made us Your children, heirs of Your heavenly kingdom and partakers of Your heavenly grace.

Forgive us, we pray, for those times when we have not lived as Your children and, in Your eternal love, renew us, that we might grow in faith and love toward You.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.