**Psalm 41:9** February 17, 2016

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Mid-week Lent 2

*Psalm 41:9 Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.*

**The Prophets Predicted… Betrayal by His Friends**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Traitors have a special place in our traditions. It is getting to be almost 250 years since Benedict Arnold betrayed American forces in New York to the British, and yet we all know who he is. To Americans it is Benedict Arnold, to Greeks it is Ephialtes. Ephialtes is the man who betrayed the 300 Spartans guarding the pass at Thermopylae. Greeks still know their traitor’s name two thousand five hundred years later. And the Christian knows Judas. Traitor’s names live on and on. Their acts of betrayal are not forgotten.

This psalm, Psalm 41, is a psalm about betrayal. It was written by David. David knew about betrayal. The Old Testament tells us about three different people who betrayed David. One was his five-star general Joab. That is in 1 Kings chapter 1. Another was his personal royal counselor, Ahithophel. That was in 2 Samuel 15. Another time David’s own son, Absalom, rebelled against David, chasing him from Jerusalem, taking up residence in David’s palace, and leading Israel’s army in war against David. David had to go into exile, running for his life from his own son. That is also in 2 Samuel. The author of Psalm 41 under the Holy Spirit’s guidance knew about betrayal.

What do you feel like when the people closest to you turn out to be your enemies? I hope you never experience it, but many of you already have. What happens when you find out that someone close to you, someone you trust and love, what happens when you find out it was all a lie? It is so terrible that we don’t even like to imagine it. The shoulders slump, the color drains from the face, the legs get weak, you need to sit down. You feel like you are on the inside of an soda can as its being crushed, the world crumples in. We have known people in those places and we ache for them. Oh, how we ache for them. There is no pain like betrayal.

It wouldn’t be so bad, if people just came out in the open. But why do they pretend? Why do they pretend they are friends, that they like you?

David wrote about this experience in another psalm, *“If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend”* (Psalm 55:12-13).

That is what Jesus felt when he saw Judas. Judas had been part of the Jesus’ inner circle called The Twelve. Now Judas led a company of soldiers to arrest Jesus. Soldiers sent from the enemies of Jesus—what else would you expect? But Judas? ***“Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heal against me”*** said David in Psalm 41, in our sermon text. Jesus repeated it a thousand years later in John 13, ***“Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heal against me.”*** You see, even this betrayal, it had been predicted by God’s prophets. Remember our theme for this year’s Lenten services: What the Prophets Said about the Suffering Servant.

Yet when Jesus quoted the prophet David, he left out one part. He didn’t say, ***“Whom I trusted.”*** Unlike David’s traitors, Judas wasn’t a surprise to Jesus. Jesus had known about it long before it happened. Let’s rewind Jesus’ life several months. Do you remember when Jesus fed the crowd of 5,000? Just after that, Jesus warned—not the 5,000 but the Twelve—*“One of you is a devil”* (John 6:70). Again, at their last meal together, hours before the betrayal, Jesus warned Judas. Yet Jesus never outed Judas. He confronted Judas with his sin and gave him a chance to turn around, to leave his ways. Still, Judas continued.

Finally, even while Judas was in the act of betraying his teacher, his Savior, once everything was out in the open and public, as the other Eleven felt the despair of betrayal and their shoulders slumped and their minds searched for answers, even then Jesus asked Judas, *“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man?”* (Luke 22:48). Just as the prophets said, Jesus was betrayed by his close friend, a man who had shared his bread.

Yet Jesus’ shed his blood, even for the betrayer. Look at the faithful love of our Savior. Even when standing face to face with the betrayer of his trust, he still called him to salvation. Even then it was not too late for Judas. Jesus said, “Yes, even for you I am shedding my blood.” Thus Jesus practiced what he had preached, *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”* (Matthew 5:44).

For us Christians, we have much to contemplate in this scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. People who do not know Jesus as their Savior – we understand why they oppose him. They are not believers. We understand why they oppose God’s definition of marriage. We understand why they support abortion. We understand why they are not particularly bothered to use God’s name in vain. The prophets do not express surprise that the enemies of God’s Suffering Servant put him to death. They *do* marvel at people like us: people who know their Savior, and yet betray him.

We have a way—and there is a reason for this—we have a way of minimizing the sins of Christians. The reason is because we live in a state of grace. There is not a little light above our head indicating whether we would go to heaven or hell at a specific moment. As if, now I am filled with holy thoughts and the light is green (heaven), and then as soon as I lose my temper the light turns red (hell). As a father has compassion on his children, so our God has compassion and patience with us. Just as we humans great inconsistencies in our human relations, so we are in our spiritual relations. We sometimes do choose sin—and yet remain in God’s grace because of his forgiveness.

But though we live in a state of grace, we dare never minimize the sins of Christians. It is dangerous for two reasons. The first reason is because every sin is damnable, even sins of weakness, of ignorance, of word or even thought. Christ had to pay for each sin. And each sin grieves our heavenly Father. And so we must never think of sin but lightly.

Secondly, as soon as we give ourselves the impression that some sins are not serious, we are on the brink of condoning sin. And from condoning sin it is not a far stretch to denying Jesus as our Savior. The Bible has this to say about believers who leave the faith, *“It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs”* (2 Peter 2:21); *“It is impossible for those… who have shared in the Holy Spirit… if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance”* (Hebrews 6:4-6).

The sin of a traitor to Christ is indeed worse than the sin of an enemy to Christ. And in fact, it is a special pain to our Savior, God’s Suffering Servant, when we who know him, sin against him.

Yet as Jesus reached out to Judas, even after his mad act of betrayal, so Jesus reaches out to all who have believed in their Savior and even those who have betrayed him.

When we Christians feel tempted to trade in our Savior for a temptation before us, may our prayer ever be that of the hymn we sang a few minutes ago:

“In the hour of trial, Jesus, plead for me  
 Lest by base denial I unworthy be.  
When you see me waver, with a look recall,  
 Nor for fear or favor ever let me fall.” (CW 116:1) Amen.