

The False Follower

Listos! Are You Ready? Pt. 6

Are you *ready* for the holiday season? Ready or not, it is upon us. We've been talking this fall about being *listos* – being “ready” for what God wants to do through us in the world. And we're exploring Jesus' own training session with his disciples on the night before his death. John chapters 13–17 contains the longest passage of Jesus teaching in all the Bible and it was his attempt to get his followers ready for life without him. At least without him in the flesh.

Now, we've just spent three weeks looking at the significance of the foot washing. And with that very powerful imagery established, we turn for a few weeks to look at the nature of following Jesus. And this morning we're going to start with the false follower. This morning's text is about Judas. Let's get into it, **John 13:21–30...**

“After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.” 22 His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. 23 One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. 24 Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.” 25 Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” 26 Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of

Simon Iscariot. 27 As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.”

28 “But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. 29 Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. 30 As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.”

Ah Judas. Can you imagine single-handedly making a name go out of circulation for generations? How many kids named “Judas” do you run across? I'm wearing a pair of Adidas shoes this morning. Named for the founder of the company, *Adolf* Dasler. He was German. He decided to go by the nickname “Adi” – wise choice, Adi Das! But “Judas” makes “Adolf” look like “Noah” the most popular boy name of 2023 – you might say Noah is *flooding* the market!

Any-hoo... This very poignant, tragic account of Jesus talking to Judas the night before he dies, is very instructive for us for this reason; every culture struggles with the gospel at some point. The Gospel *challenges* every culture somewhere and it doesn't totally fit in any culture. So in non-Western cultures, shame and honor cultures, what the Gospel says about free forgiveness and grace and non-retaliation, they struggle with that. But in our relativistic Western cultures, what we mainly struggle with is what the Bible says about *sin*.

And this passage tells us quite a bit about that, we're going to learn a lot about first, *the nature* of sin, secondly, *the power* of sin, and thirdly, *the only medicine* for it. The nature, the power and the only medicine for it. But let's not miss the beginning, which is really important. And it's very easy to go past it quickly. **V.21**, "*After he had said this, Jesus was **troubled in spirit** and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."*

So we're told that Jesus Christ is thinking about the fact that one of his disciples is about to betray him to his death. And his response was to be, "troubled in spirit", and it's a very strong term that literally means to be torn to pieces. So Jesus is *not* speaking in a detached way. He doesn't say, "Well, you know, this was inevitable. I knew it was going to happen. You just can't find loyal staff these days." None of that detachment. He's also not flying off the handle, offended in his dignity saying, "How *dare* you, you little...after *all* I've done for you?" None of that either; instead, he's torn up.

And what does it mean, he's torn up? This gives us insight into our **first point, The Nature of Sin**, which is *deeply* relational. You see, when you and I think of sin, we tend to think of it as violating a moral law. In other words, violating a rule. And just for the record, when the Bible says, "Thou shalt not lie", and you lie, that is a sin. Okay, everybody, just let's get that straight. That *is* a sin, you *have* broken a rule, but where does the rule *come* from?

And because we have a tendency to think of sin as *just* breaking the rule - even though it is - if that's the *limit* of your concept, you're really not going to be able to understand the enormity of sin in the Bible. And this matters because, look, I hear people say this to me all the time. They say, "Well, I'm not religious, but I'm a good person. Isn't that what matters? I'm not religious, but I'm a good person. Isn't that all that counts?" No. And here's why.

Let me give you an illustration. Imagine a poor widow. She's left with an only child...an only son. And she teaches him to be good. That is, she teaches him always tell the truth, always work hard, and always help the poor. She also sacrifices *everything* to get him through college. I mean, she makes no money and so she she spends nothing on herself, and she works incredibly long hours, but with incredible self-sacrifice she gets the money to put him through college, and he gets a degree and he goes out and gets a great career. The American Dream!

And after he graduates, he virtually never talks to his mother again. Oh, if you ask him, he will certainly admit the existence of a mother. He says "Oh, I believe there is a mother. And also, I send her a Christmas card, every year!" But he never goes to see her, never calls her, he doesn't go and honor her and love her, and give her all the relationship that he *owes* her - because he owes her *everything*. So he says, "Well, no, no, I never go see my mother or anything like that. But what matters is I'm a good person. I tell the truth. I work hard, and I always help the poor. And surely, that's enough, isn't it?"

And what are you going to say to him? Are you going to introduce him to your single daughter? No you are not. You're going to say – with disgust - “Wait a minute, you're looking to the technical ethicalness of your life. When you have committed a relational betrayal - you *betrayed* her! You owe her *everything*. You're being ethical, but you're being ethical for yourself. You're working hard and you're telling the truth, but you're doing it for *yourself*. You've *betrayed* her.” Yeah, that's right.

Do you see? Yes, when you sin, you break God's law. But primarily, you're trampling on that relationship. You owe God far more than that young man owes his mother; and therefore, sin is grievous. The background for Jesus being torn up by the sin he sees, is Genesis chapter 6 – speaking of Noah! - where we're told that God looked on the earth and saw all the evil and the sin. And it said, (**Genesis 6:6**) “*The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.*” What it literally says in the Hebrew is, “His heart was filled with pain!”

And the Hebrew word for “pain” that is used of God in Genesis 6 when He looks at sin and evil, is the same word for “pain” that's used repeatedly in Genesis 3. That's the story of the fall of Adam and Eve and it repeatedly says that as the result of humanity's sin - when the human race turned away from God - our work is *painful*, childbearing is *painful*, life is *painful* now.

And here's what it means. God has so bound His heart to us, that when He sees *us* in pain, it causes *Him* pain. Which means when you sin, you don't just break God's law, you break God's heart. You're not just breaking an ethical rule. You are *trampling* on the relationship. And as soon as you begin to see that, the very thing that would make you absolutely *offended* by a young man who owed everything to his mother and he goes off and he's living an ethical life, but he ignores her - you would just be offended by that.

Well, be offended at yourself. Be upset with yourself because if there *is* a God, we owe Him everything. If there's a God who created us and sustained us - if you believe that, if there is a God - you owe it to Him not just to be ethical, but to do *everything* for Him. Do you, do we? No! And it breaks His heart; it tramples on His heart.

Now, unless you see that and understand that, you aren't going to be able to do...well, three things. One is you're not going to understand the enormity of sin, you're going to tend to take it lightly. But secondly, when you come to somebody *else* who's done something wrong, how do you respond? Do you respond like Jesus? Not usually. We either are kind of like indifferent to it - we shrug it off - Jesus would *never* shrug it off and he's torn up by it.

But on the other hand, we might just denounce it and kind of feel good about the denouncing. “I can’t believe you’re the kind of person would do something like *that!*” You know we do that more on the internet than in person but still, you know, Jesus is torn up by it. We shouldn’t laugh at or wink at it - Jesus is torn up. But neither should we just denounce it and say how stupid you people are. Jesus is torn up by it, are you?

Are you torn up by knowing that the way you live tears up *his* heart? It violates his glory – that’s the issue. See, the Bible says, **Romans 3:23**, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*,”. And frankly, this is what the young man is doing, violating the glory of his mother. What does that mean? He’s not giving her the love and honor - that’s what glory is - *due* her. But when you see sin “falls short of the glory of God”, you know, it seems abstract. It seems like oh yeah, we’re offending God’s dignity in some way.

Well, we are. But we are trampling on the relationship with the one to whom we owe everything. So anyway, number one, do you see the nature of sin? Do you see its relational character? Do you see its grievousness? If you see that, it’ll change the way in which you look at your own heart and the way in which you’d regard other people and it’ll be more like Jesus - and we’re not. Number one, that’s the nature of sin.

But number two: secondly, in particular, Judas’s example shows us The Power of Sin. Notice at the very end, v.30, it says “*As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.*” Now, those of you who know anything about writing and art know that John is not just simply saying, “and by the way, you know, it was nighttime.” He’s not just telling you “Oh, I just want to make sure you know, it’s not daytime, it’s nighttime.” He’s not just talking about time.

One of the great literary themes of the book of John is darkness and light. We are going to see this up close in our Christmas series in a couple of weeks – it’s all over John chapter 1. And so when it says that Judas went out into the night, it’s saying, as Judas plunged himself into the *physical* darkness, he was being plunged into *spiritual* darkness. You say, “Well, what do you mean spiritual darkness? What are we talking about here?”

People are constantly speculating about the motivation for Judas. Every movie, every play, every rock opera, every story, everybody constantly tries to propose, you know, motives for why Judas did what he did. And yet, guess what, it’s speculative. And I’ve actually tried over the years to think about it and I’m not going to speculate because the Bible doesn’t give us a look inside. What the Bible tells us about sin is this; Sin is the soul *curved in on itself* to serve itself rather than God or others.

Sin makes your own ego and your own needs more real than anything else so that *anything* else gets discarded or trampled on in order to meet your needs. Sin is the sole curved in on itself to serve itself and therefore trample on anything else in order to get its needs met.

There's millions of forms of this. We don't exactly know the form this was taking in Judas's heart, but we do know the *power* of how sin was operating in his heart. And what do I mean by that? Here's three things we learned from looking at Judas about the power of sin: number one, the power of sin is to remain, to not be uprooted. The power of sin to stay put. When you think you've gotten over something...it's still there. How many movies does the hero beat up the villain...and then turn their back on them. Don't turn your back, he's getting up!

So, the power of sin is to remain. They say, you know, that if there is a nuclear holocaust, the only thing that will remain are the cockroaches. And the reason is that evidently, cockroaches can take like tens of thousands of times more radiation before they die than we can, or other animals can.

Now, here's what's interesting. Judas has been getting the biggest blast, of love, of glory, of holiness. Listen, *no one* else...There's twelve people that Jesus Christ has been training - hands on - and *living* with. He's gotten the *love* of Jesus Christ full blast. He's gotten the *holiness* of Jesus Christ. The beauty of his life, his teaching, his wisdom. Judas Iscariot has had, you might say, a direct *blast* of the unbelievable love and joy and glory of Jesus Christ...and the cockroach of his sin is still alive.

That is to say he never actually gave Jesus Christ his heart. You see, even though he had been doing everything, and he'd been listening, and he'd been very, very busy...you know, he'd been doing it for himself. He never said in his heart to Jesus Christ, "I want to live for you. I want to do this for you." Instead, he was doing it to help himself, to advance himself. He had never given Jesus Christ his heart.

Every time you think, "Oh, if I just try hard I can get rid of sin. I can uproot this bad habit, I can uproot this thing. This is not good but I can work at it, I can take a course, I'll read a book, I'll try really hard. I'll have an accountability partner." Every time you think you've uprooted sin, there's more in there. Sin has got the cockroach power to remain. You'll *never* be able on your own - with your own power - to uproot it. So number one, sin has the power to remain.

And the reason why is number two, the power of sin to *hide*. Oh my goodness, does it! I think one of the most interesting things about this whole passage is this. In verse 21 Jesus says “one of you is going to betray me.” And in verse 22, the disciples stared at one another at a loss to know which of them he meant. Isn’t that interesting? They had *no idea* who he was talking about.

Jesus didn’t say “one of you is gonna betray me” and they all sided-eyed Judas and said, “We’ve been thinking he seemed a little shady. You know, I’ve been thinking about that because when we would go out to cast out demons, Judas’s demon never came out. And when we would go out to cleanse the lepers, Judas’s leper never got healed. And I remember thinking, there’s something wrong here.”

In fact, look carefully at the very end, even though Jesus said one of you is gonna betray me, even though John or the disciple Jesus love said, “Who is it?” and Jesus says the one I give the dipped bread to, and he does it. In *spite* of all that, it says, v. **29**, “*Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor.*”

In other words, even *after* Jesus actually indicates to some of them, “this is the one who’s going to betray me”, it just doesn’t click. Here’s what this means. Judas looked like *everybody* else. He had been in ministry, he *had* been casting out demons, he *had* been healing the sick, because *all* of the disciples went out doing that.

There was absolutely *no* indication that he was less enthusiastic, or he was enjoying the teaching less, or that he didn’t participate in class and raise his hand. He looked like *everybody* else. And that’s the way sin is. How does sin hide? Well, one of the ways it hides is actually the way it probably hid with Judas. And that is, you look at all the good you’re doing. I knew a man who was a very successful minister but was brought down by clergy sexual misconduct. He was sleeping with a woman in the congregation who was not his wife.

And for quite a long time it went on and he told me, here’s what happened. He’d start to feel guilty about it. And then he’d preach a great sermon. And afterwards, people come up with tears in their eyes saying, “Oh, you just changed my life!” And then he’d think, “I can’t be that bad.” That’s the Judas thing. You know, “my demons come out, my lepers are cleansed, I’m helping people, I can’t be *that* bad. Yeah there are issues, but I can’t be that bad.”

You hide it from *yourself*. “I’m not a workaholic, I’m just very productive. I’m not an alcoholic, I’m the life of the party. I’m not abrasive and mean, I just have high standards. I’m not stingy, I’m just prudent. I’m not a racist, it’s just, you know, you really can’t trust *those* people.” Sin hides. It hides until it’s too late. It hides until you find yourself doing things that you didn’t think you were capable of.

So, the power of sin to remain, the power of sin to hide, but then lastly, there’s the power of sin to grow. Now, we didn’t read it today, but a couple of week ago we read **John 13:2**, “*The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.*” But today, down in verse 27, we read that as soon as Judas took the bread, Satan “entered” into him, that’s *progression*. That’s growth, negative growth, malignancy.

And what it’s really saying is, in the beginning, sin is sort of outside, kind of knocking on your door, but if you let it in, next thing you know, it’s dominating you. In Genesis 4, God actually does something with Cain - you know, Cain and Abel? God does something with Cain that’s *very* similar to what Jesus is doing with Judas. Cain is getting really upset. The fact that Abel is actually having a more successful life, more good things are happening to Abel, he’s becoming a more successful person than Cain, and Cain begins to resent it and begins to get really upset.

And God sees what’s happening and God comes to Cain and in a *remarkable* point - I love the fact that God actually comes to Cain, He comes to Elijah, He comes to Jonah, and He *counsels* them. So God comes to Cain and He says, “Sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you but you must master it.” Remarkable. Here’s God, using a metaphor. Sin is like an animal crouching in the corner, *hiding* from you. So the sin of your life always hides from you. You always find a way of justifying, you always find a way of saying, “well look at all the good I’m doing”, you know?

But it wants to *have* you, God says. Which means that sin starts as something that you still have control of but eventually you *don’t* have control of it. Sin is not just something you do, it’s something you create, it’s a force, a darkness that you actually create *in* yourself. Because every time you *think* - a selfish thought, an angry thought, a vengeful thought, a prejudiced thought, a dishonest thought, a greedy thought, a proud thought - every time you *think* and you indulge in that thought, it gets easier to actually *do* it. And every time you do it, it gets you to do it *again*...and again and again and again. And eventually it masters you.

Now, I'm excited about this, because it gives me an excuse to mention *two* of my heroes - C.S. Lewis *and* J.R.R. Tolkien. By the way, they were friends and the latter led the former to Christian faith. Which means we got many great books, including *The Great Divorce*, where Lewis tells the story about a woman who started grumbling and became a grumble. And the way he describes it is so frightening to me.

He says, "It begins with a grumbling mood, and yourself still distinct from it: perhaps criticizing it. And yourself, in a dark hour, may will that mood, embrace it. You can repent and come out of it again. But there may come a day when you can do that no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood, nor even to enjoy it, but **just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine.**" (*Great Divorce*, 74))

That's C.S. Lewis. J.R.R. Tolkien kind of expressed this in narrative through the character of Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*. Now, I have read this trilogy in every decade of my life since my teens. But interestingly, somebody once asked Tolkien if *he* ever reread it himself? And he said that he did. And then they asked if there was any part or parts that always stood out to him?

And Tolkien said there's *one* spot at the end of the second book that he could never read without being moved to tears. It's the most moving part of the whole book, he said. Well, *that's* interesting. And it's a Judas, John 13 moment. Gollum is a hobbit who over the years had become a very evil, cruel, selfish being. His enslavement to "the ring" – the very representation of binding sin – had literally caused him to curve in on himself.

But he gets a new master – Frodo, who loves him - and slowly because of his kindness and his love, Gollum starts to melt a little bit. There's a little bit of his old self gleaming in his eye for the first time in decades. In fact, he'd set up a trap for Sam and Frodo but one night while Frodo was sleeping, he began to regret it. He looked down at the sleeping hobbit looking rather angelic, and it says, "A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate." (*The Two Towers*, 324)

And for a moment, he thinks he needs to repent – maybe he won't go through with the betrayal. And then suddenly, up comes Sam, accuses him of sneaking around, calls him some mean names. And instantly Gollum's eyes grow cold again. His heart hardened. And the text says, "The fleeting moment had passed, beyond recall." And Gollum goes ahead with his plan to sell out the Hobbits to the evil spider.

And Tolkien said he can never read that passage without weeping. So you see the Judas moment? Betrayal, but a chance to repent. But sometimes that chance is fleeting. And you can harden your heart – or just turn your attention away - and the fleeting moment will pass, beyond recall. Until there’s just a grumble left, there’s just the anger left, there’s no you left.

“Sin is crouching at your door,” God says, “It desires to have you, but you must master it.” If there’s anybody in this room that’s been *thinking* about making a change, thinking about something wrong right now in your life saying “I really need to change that, I really need to repent of that, I really need to correct that” but you’ve been putting it off...as you value your life, don’t do that! What makes you think you’ll be able to repent *at will*? You don’t understand the power of sin.

Which leads us to the last point. And that is, **what is The Medicine for Sin?** What is the medicine? What does Jesus offer Judas, which is the only medicine that could possibly cure this powerful, hidden, deeply rooted thing in our hearts? Well, here’s what he does. It says, (v.26) “*Then dipping a piece of bread, He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.*”

Now, by the way, every commentator will tell you that when you sat at a feast, one of the first things everybody ate was bread, which was dipped in a kind of fruit puree - dates and raisins and wine - kind of a dip. And for the host of the feast to dip the bread and give it to somebody was a sign of honor and it was a sign of affection, and it was a sign of love.

And who did Jesus give the honorary bread to first? And get this. Judas has already heard Jesus say, “one of you is going to betray me.” So Judas knows Jesus knows. But *then* Jesus hands him the bread. And the message is as clear as could possibly be; Judas hears Jesus saying, ‘I see you. I see you all way to the bottom. I know *everything*. And I still love you. And I still *want* you. Please come to me.” You know what’s going on here? This is one last, incredibly hot bright blast of love into a slowly darkening, freezing heart.

What is Jesus offering Judas? What does he offer him? Just love? Well, yes, *but*...Miroslav Volf, in his great book *Exclusion and Embrace* takes a good look at the Cain and Abel story, which is very similar here – as we’ve already said. And Miroslav Volf goes back and asks, “Why was Cain so angry? Why was Cain getting that resentful? Why was Cain becoming capable of murder?” Which of course is what he did do.

And with a certain amount of speculation, but I think very reasonably so, Miroslav Volf says that probably, Cain was really angry when Abel got successful because Cain had developed an identity. This actually happens in an awful lot of families. And that identity was based on the fact that Cain felt that “I’m the *best* of the kids. I’m the one that parents consider the *most* successful, the best one, I’m the best of the children.” Okay? And his identity was very much based on that.

Why would he be so upset and murderously angry when Abel begins to get more successful? That’s the reason. It’s because his *identity* is being threatened. And here’s what Volf says, “Cain’s identity was constructed from the start in relationship to Abel; he was great in relation to Abel’s ‘nothingness’. When God pronounced Abel ‘better’, Cain either had to readjust radically his identity, or eliminate Abel.” And then he says, “The power of sin rests less on the insuppressible urge of an effect than on the persuasiveness of the good reasons, generated by a perverted self in order to maintain its own false identity.” (*Exclusion and Embrace*, 96)

Let me translate. Everybody in this room has a false identity. Everybody in this room says, “My identity, the reason I feel good about myself, is because I make money. Because I live in Austin. Because I’ve got children who love me. Because I’m involved in this really important political cause.” Or *something!* But everybody’s got an identity and it’s grounded in something. “I’m the sibling that my parents love, and all the other siblings have disappointed my parents, but I’m the good kid, I’m the stable one.”

You know, there’s a *million* versions; they’re all false identities, why? They’re *fragile* identities! Because they’re based on *you* performing, and if they’re based on you performing, then when something jeopardizes that, when it looks like you might fail or somebody is blocking you, then you suddenly get furious or you start to melt down...why? Because of a false identity that is threatened.

And Volf is right when he says that the power of sin rests less on some insuppressible urge - I mean Cain wasn’t just somebody who just had these murderous urges - the murderous urge was coming because of the false identity. And that means we don’t have to be monsters to do evil. Judas was no monster. We just have to have a false identity take hold of our hearts and then let it be threatened.

Jesus Christ is offering every one of us - like Judas - a *new* identity. “I see you to the bottom. I’ve seen all that’s wrong with you”...especially, think about Judas. If there’s *anybody* who deserves hell, here’s somebody who had privileges none of us have ever had, *nobody’s* ever had, except those other other 11 disciples. Jesus Christ, the Son of God to love you, and live with you, and train you for three years. If there’s *anybody* who deserves hell...

But Jesus Christ says, “I look all the way to the bottom of your heart and I still offer unconditional love, in spite of what you’ve done.” That means he’s offering Judas a new identity. He’s offering *all of us* a new identity. But Judas decides, either because he’s furious with being made to feel guilty, or because he doesn’t want to lose control, there could be a million reasons why, when he took the bread, he just resolved to go through with the betrayal. And he was taken over.

Now, do you know where this medicine comes from? It’s an amazing medicine. Why can Jesus offer us this new identity? Here’s why. He says, ‘*what you’re about to do, do quickly.*’ Do it quickly. Now, until recently what I’ve always thought that he was just saying, “Okay, if you’re going to sin, go ahead and sin, just get it over with...” but that doesn’t make sense; it doesn’t make any sense at all. That Jesus is just saying, “Look, you’re going to destroy yourself, go destroy yourself.” That doesn’t fit with *anything* else we know about Jesus. It fits in with *nothing* else he’s done in the passage.

But here’s what he *is* saying...Have you ever been watching one of those movies where people are coming up with an elaborate plan to do something? And so they plan, and they plan, and they plan, and they plan – it’s the montage right? And finally, the leader says let’s do it. Let’s do this thing. And they go off and do it.

That’s what Jesus is saying. Because see, when Judas goes out the door, that starts the ball rolling, and within hours, he’s going to be crucified. This is, “Let’s do it.” You know why? Why is Jesus so torn up? Here’s why Jesus Christ is torn up. Here’s why *God* is torn up. Because He’s good. In other words, if for example, if you were good in the sense of perfectly loving but not good in the sense of perfectly just, or if you were good in the sense of very moral, but not good in the sense of endlessly loving, you wouldn’t be torn up when you see somebody sinning. Right? In other words, if you love a person and you see them sinning, and you say, “Oh, well forget about it”, then you’re good in the sense of being loving, but you’re not good in the sense of being just.

Or on the other hand, if you see somebody sinning and you say, “Good riddance, just get out of here, punish those people, get rid of them.” You’d be good in the sense of being committed to justice, but not good in the sense of being loving. But here’s the reason why the Son of God, and why *God*, is torn up. Because God is perfectly good.

He is so good that He can't just say, "Oh, it doesn't really matter that you're sinning." He knows that it needs to be punished. But God is also so perfectly good that He can't just say, "Oh well, you have to be punished." He says, "I don't want to punish you." Go to Hosea 11 sometime, where God is saying to Israel, you *need* to be punished, you *deserve* punishment, you *must* be punished...and yet in the end He says, "How can I give you up? How can I hand you over? I won't carry out my anger, my compassion is aroused."

Now, if there's anybody in this room who's ever loved a real fool, you'll know something of this. Have you ever loved a foolish child or a foolish parent or foolish friend? You understand what God is going through. On the one hand, you just want to see them get their comeuppance, that's what they really deserve. That's really what they probably need. On the other hand, you don't *want* to see them get their comeuppance. And so you go back and forth and back and forth.

And because we are human beings, you're going have to choose - you're almost always going have to choose justice over love, or love over justice. But God is perfect. And both love and justice are *equally* part of God's goodness. And God does *not* have to choose, and both His love and justice will be satisfied...and where? On the cross.

Jesus says, "Let's *do* this thing; so I can offer this medicine to everybody, so I can offer a true identity to everyone. We have to get this done."

And on the cross, God's justice was completely fulfilled because sin was punished, and His love was completely fulfilled because anyone who believes in Jesus Christ can be offered unconditional love, no matter how deep your betrayals are. Judas went into the darkness, but on the cross darkness came down on Jesus, right? **Matthew 27:45-46**, "*From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land....Jesus cried out in a loud voice... "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*" The darkness that sin deserves came down on Jesus. So that when you believe in him, he can say, "I see you to the bottom. I've seen everything you've ever done. I see stuff in your heart that you can't even admit is there...and I love you anyway."

Three things quick and we're done. A: If there's anybody who thinks that you can overcome your problems by working hard, reading a book, taking a course, or something like that, *forget* it. The stuff that is wrong with you is so deeply rooted that nothing less than a regeneration of the Holy Spirit, a new identity, a complete surrender to God...that's the only thing that will work.

B: If there's anybody here thinking about making any kind of changes to your life because you say "I really ought to repent or that I really ought to change that", do it *now*, don't think you can do it anytime you want. Confess it to somebody. Take it to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a plan to deal with it. What hubris to think you can do it anytime you want? No one knows what tomorrow has in store.

And lastly, hey, take the bread. I kind of blew it and we had communion *last* week. And I was writing this sermon and I literally slapped my forehead. Missed it by a week! Because of the ongoing tradition of holy communion – the bread and the cup – we all of us have the same opportunity Judas did. Jesus offers you the bread that is his body.

But of course, it's a metaphor, it's not magic. Not downplaying the Eucharist, but I'm not Catholic either. What matters is what the Lord's Supper represents. And what it represents is that Jesus' body really was broken...his blood really was shed...for you.

Communion or not, Jesus is offering you the bread this morning. Let it melt your heart. I don't care what you've done, I don't care how bad things are in your life, Jesus says "If you repent right now you can eat. And I will give you a new identity that is indestructible. Because it is based on my life and my accomplishments – not yours – and nothing, not even death, can overcome that identity."

Let's pray...