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“On the Night When He Was Betrayed” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman
(4/6/2023, Maundy Thursday)

Let us pray. Almighty God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer Amen.

We heard a phrase tonight in the reading from First Corinthians chapter 11. It was in verse 23. In the phrase was on the night when he was betrayed if you are a frequent flyer at St. Albans, if you are regular here, you've heard that phrase, every time we celebrate Holy Communion, and we begin by saying on the night on which He was betrayed, and it comes here from St. Paul's letter to the church, in an ancient city called Corinth. That's how we retell the story. Sunday by Sunday, every time we celebrate Holy Communion here, in which He was betrayed. The night when he was betrayed, that's Monday, Thursday. That's tonight. That's how tonight is known that night on which He was betrayed. We could have in our liturgy on Maundy Thursday, but we don't call it that we say on the night in which He was betrayed every single time. And that phrase gives you the key to, I think, two really important things about why we come out to church, right? There are two days which the Lord has decreed you come to church, the first is Sunday, the other is Wednesday night. Why would we be here on a Thursday? Why are you here on a Thursday? Well, Maundy Thursday, the night on which He was betrayed, that phrase tells us two things. The first is that Maundy Thursday is sort of ground zero for the human condition. It's where we see on full display, that human beings, even the best ones, are self centered, competitive. They compare themselves to other people to see who's best. They are envious. skeptical of others, we justify our own actions. Even when we know they're wrong, we make promises with 100% resolution to keep them and then we break them publicly and completely. We see in these stories, pride, and resistance to grace and forgiveness. We see how bad we are at doing the right thing, even when we know what that is. I mean, the stories are just full of all of this. We see Judas of course, the one who does betray Jesus quite directly helps the authorities to find him. Apparently Jesus just didn't stand out in a crowd just look like any other troublemaking Judean peasant. So Judas had to help the Romans pick out from these nondescript grubby travelers, the one that claimed to be the Messiah. And if he got rewarded for that deed, well, didn't hurt anyone. We see, of course, Peter, who is the one who makes that promise, a full resolve never to betray Christ, I will never desert you, I will never betray you. And of course, he goes on to do just that. At the dinner before that, when Jesus offers to wash the

disciples feet, Peter says, Get away. No, I will not receive Your Grace. I will not receive this. I'm too proud. The disciples argue about which one of them is the greatest. That's something you would think only happens at the kids table. But on Monday, Thursday, the grown ups do it. We don't do it out loud as much but we absolutely do it. That's what social media is for.

When they go out to the garden to pray, and Jesus says wait and watch and not one, not two, but three times And they not off.

These are people who know Jesus. These are people who have had a more immediate indirect connection with him than you or I will ever have this side of glory. These are people who are not folks who weren't all in are weren't committed, they left everything to follow Him, they had spent time with him for three years, you have maybe memorized a verse or two, at least John, three 316. You think you know it, or you know, it's important even if you don't know the words, these heard the teachings of Jesus over and over from His own lips. And this is how they fall. On the night, when he was betrayed. This is all of us to in England, in the city of Durham, there is a cathedral. And beginning in the 14th century until today, there was a ritual that happens every Monday, Thursday. And it's the only place as far as I know in Christendom where this takes place. It's the ceremony of the Judas cup. Now cathedral doesn't have a rector Cathedral has a dean and in this ceremony, the Dean takes a cup of wine. He sips from it, and quotes Jesus, one of you will betray me. And he does this gathered in a circle with the chapter the other Canons are clergy, and lay leaders of the cathedral. And after saying one of you will betray me, he passes the cup to one of them. And they each say surely not i Lord. Then they drink. And they pass to the next person who says the same thing. In the earliest days of this tradition, the cup was manufactured so that on the bottom was painted the face of Judas. And it's more of a bowl shallow layer so you could see through to the bottom so as you lifted it to your lips to drink, you would see your reflection merged with the face of Judas. Maundy Thursday is ground zero for the human condition because what happens on this night is that every single person involved in the story except Jesus comes to some sort of massive crisis of being cracked open and being revealed to their own selves that they are not the put together person that they thought they were. And this is what Maundy Thursday is about. And I have found that whether it happens on Monday, Thursday or some other time in your life, you will already have been or are being cracked open, meaning you have a view of yourself. That's basically Okay.

Of all the humans who've ever lived, you're at least getting a B. Maundy Thursday is the time when you realize you are not passing the course.

Most of us live with some sort of delusion or illusion about what kind of person we are. And we give ourselves the biggest curve to grade on

in the areas of life we're not doing well. If you are someone with a volcanic temper, you have a reason why you think that is legitimate. If you are someone who is greedy, you've made some story to cover it up or maybe just to deny it. If you are someone who is always comparing yourself to other people. There's often a blindness to that. We even use religion to do it. Maybe you don't think of yourself as a gossiper. But are you someone who shares prayer requests about other people's lives? Maundy Thursday is supposed to crack you open. It's supposed to give you a crisis. At least that's what happens to the people in these stories. That's the first thing that Maundy Thursday does the night on which He was betrayed. Surely not i Lord, yes. But the second thing that Maundy Thursday shows us, and this is quite plain, and really quite moving. And that is the love of God. It's like these human beings. It's like failure show and tell everybody in the story. It's like, look how I failed. Look how I denied. And in any normal human interaction, if somebody presented to you with their worst failures and their worst characteristics and their darkest secrets and the things they haven't told anyone, and the real reason they do the things they do all those things that that were to come out, we tend to run the other direction, and over and over and over in the story, Jesus runs even more hastily towards the people who are failing him over and over, he stays. He moves towards them and washes their feet after this dinner, where he has just heard Peter lie. And he washes his feet, he just had all them promised to stay with him and he washes their feet, he makes himself so vulnerable, taking the form of a servant removing his outer clothing kneeling before them. When he's in the garden, with those sleepy guards, when the crowd comes to arrest him, he could have said, No, you've got the wrong guy, it's these and run. He's outside of Jerusalem at that point outside the city walls. And with no street lights, or ambient glare, he's in darkness. If he'd run 10 yards, he would have been invisible to the soldiers who came to arrest him. But he stays, even tells His disciples to not fight back, Put your sword away.

We build boundaries and walls, and we put on armor all to protect us boundaries to keep others out. Coping mechanisms to protect against the pain, the delusions that we tell ourselves, we're not really as bad as we may think we are. And Jesus here, cracks US Open and allows us to see who we are. And in doing so, does not run away, does not shake his finger at us but makes himself even more vulnerable and goes towards us. That's really all I want to say tonight. You may be well past your experience of being cracked open. It might happen tomorrow, when you get an email. You may be in it right now. And what Maundy Thursday shows us is that no matter how far we fall, Jesus never departs. Jesus never runs. Jesus never leaves he if anything moves closer towards you. cracked open people, broken people, human people are Jesus's cup of tea. If you were at a table, have having a meal, a religious joyous ceremony that you'd had every year since you were a little boy or little girl. And you knew that everybody at that table was lying to you talking behind your back and was about to desert you

publicly. What would you do in that situation? Would you carve up the pineapple upside down cake and pass it out like nothing was about to happen? You might not. But that's what Jesus does. He sees a loaf of bread still on the table. And he picks it up and breaks it and says this is my body given for you. Not because you deserve it or because you've been so great. He knows exactly who they are and who they're about to be. Takes the cup and says this is my blood for you. I embrace you at your worst and do what needs to be done for you to know that you're loved. At your worst, not at your best and that's easy. That's not divine love. Divine Love sees you at your worst and embraces you now this may be hard because you may be someone who knows someone who needs to be cracked open and you're thinking about them right now.

Oh, I wish it would all come crashing down on her head. I'd love to see his name in the tabloids surely not i Lord it's all of us so tonight as we again come to this table and you hear on the night on which He was betrayed.

Know that that says two things to think about you and something about God in Christ On the night, when he was betrayed for bread, and when he'd given thanks, He broke it and said, This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Amen.