

The Holy Week: Wednesday — The Betrayal

A Reflection for Holy Wednesday

Reflections The Passion, Cross and Resurrection 8 April 2020 (Holy Wednesday)

Mark 14:1-11 (quoted)

Mark 14:3-9 (quoted)

Mark 15:42-43 (quoted)

Betrayal is a part of human nature. It is the breaking or violation of an implied but intrinsic part of a contract, a trust or a confidence, producing moral, psychological and spiritual conflict within a relationship between two entities, individuals or organisations. Humanity has indulged in betrayal in every possible relationship, but, like sin, or as part of sin, this trait in human nature has its beginning in the Garden of Eden. It is no surprise that man has invented ingenious means of deceit and betrayal, for pleasure, profit, jealousy, suspicion, disappointment and various other reasons. Today we focus on the betrayal that took place two thousand and twenty years ago, on a Wednesday, which hastened the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. If Adam and Eve betrayed the Creator, Judas Iscariot betrayed God the Son, Jesus Christ.

Mark 14:1-11 gives us the background. Let us read part of this passage: *"After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people... And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him"* (Mark 14:1-2, 10-11).

Before we examine what provoked Judas to betray Jesus, let us understand why the chief priests and scribes moved so cautiously towards the kill.

What may have begun, for the general public, as a form of entertainment — watching Jesus perform miracles, listening to stories they could relate to, and perhaps even receiving the free meals He provided — gradually changed their view of Him. They began to revere Him: some saw Him as a good teacher; some thought Him more knowledgeable in spiritual matters than the rabbis who usually taught them; some believed Him a great orator; and a few even accepted Him as the Son of God, the Messiah. The chief priests and their party simply did not want an uproar on their hands. They waited for the right moment, and it came in the person of Judas.

Woven into this narrative is an incident whose full significance dawned

on them only much later. We read in Mark 14:3-9: *"And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."*

Mark does not tell us who the woman was. But her sins may have been great, and the forgiveness she received from Jesus may have brought about a complete turnaround in her life. If we look ahead a little, there was great haste to bury the body of Jesus before sunset, as Jewish tradition required. Mark tells us: *"And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus"* (Mark 15:42-43). There was not enough time to anoint the body properly with perfumes and oils. This woman, then, had unwittingly anointed His body two days in advance. I believe that is what Jesus meant when He defended her.

But none of this sat well with Judas. It is possible that he had been offended at being rebuked over the alabaster-box incident; or perhaps he had grown tired of waiting for Jesus to act in some "great" way and start a revolution. He realised there was to be no earthly kingdom, no money to manage and no purse to dip into. He could, however, profit from the situation by going to the chief priests and their party and making some money out of it. What we do not know is whether he understood the full implications of his action. Giving him the benefit of the doubt, he may have thought that they would simply imprison Jesus, perhaps torture Him — but what finally transpired was beyond his imagining.

I wonder: would Jesus call our worship of Him genuine and beautiful, as He did the action of that woman? If there is any apathy, or any wrong motive, in our worship, let us ask Jesus to purify us from all unrighteousness, and to make our worship genuine and beautiful.

Mark 14:10-11 tells us that Judas went to the chief priests and actively sought an opportunity to betray Jesus. This was not a betrayal of convenience that fell into his lap; Judas sought out the way to betray his Master and friend.

Friends, today is the day to ask Jesus to show us whether there is hurt, resentment, or any other feeling from betrayal still hiding in our hearts; to ask Him to heal us, and to show us other people who can help us heal; and to consider whether we need to seek reconciliation. Remember that Jesus loves us, and is with us, even when we cannot understand how. His love for us will never change.