

FORCING GOD'S HAND

Three Part Sermon Series on Judas Iscariot -- February 12, 2012 -- Luke 22: 47-53

The Church of the Covenant

Judas's betrayal of Jesus was sealed with a kiss. Or should I say an "almost kiss" because it is fairly clear from the text that while Judas' intended to kiss Jesus that in reality he never did. It is on the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus has prayed His prayers there "*his sweat became like great droplets of blood*". (Luke 22: 44) It is then His betrayer arrives to finger his Master and betray Him to the accompanying soldiers. Jesus interrupts Judas mid-betrayal and says: "*Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?*" (Luke 22: 48) It is this enigmatic sign and symbol of Judas betraying Jesus with a sign of closeness and affection and familial loyalty, a kiss, that may confound us in attempting to interpret what was Judas' intention in coming to the Garden that night. What did Judas INTEND to do versus what did Judas actually do????

At this point I am indebted to the novelist Taylor Caldwell and her novel, *I JUDAS*, for a speculative look into the motivations of Judas' heart as he betrays his Master and friend. For she posits that the real reason Judas betrays Jesus is that Judas is endeavoring to force Jesus to reveal His hand, to declare Himself to be the Messiah, and to set into motion a whole series of events which include a revolt and uprising by the Jews in order to throw out the hated Romans. As I said in last week's sermon, scholars believe that Judas was in the camp of the Zealots. The Zealots were those Jews who wanted violently to overthrow the Roman governorship of Judea. Indeed, within less than a generation of the death of Jesus the Zealots did precisely this --and it ended badly with the Emperor Titus seizing and destroying Jerusalem, 70 A.D., casting down the stones of Herod's Temple, exactly as Jesus had predicted, and sowing salt into the earth that nothing would ever grow there again. Jerusalem and Judea would never again be an independent nation until modern times. So Judas followed Jesus as Master because Judas believed that Jesus was the Messiah, was the anointed one, who would ride a white horse at the head of an avenging Jewish army to accomplish political purposes, throw out the Romans, and reestablish a fully independent Jewish state. Judas' zealotry motivated his heart --it was what Jesus could do *politically* that had him follow Jesus for three years, waiting for the right moment to declare insurrection.

So it is Palm Sunday, at the beginning of Holy Week, and Jesus rides in triumph, on the sign of victory, a donkey, into Jerusalem and into the courts of Herod's Temple. The entire Jewish nation has gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The moment is ripe for rebellion. The air is supercharged. The Zealots have doubtlessly gathered and are among the throng waving palm branches and hailing Jesus as the conquering Messiah. The Messiah has come, riding the sign of His Messiah-ship and victory right into the middle of the Temple, right at the outset of Holy Week. It is perfect. It is the perfect moment for them to announce the revolt. Judas is watching and waiting; waiting for Jesus to announce He is both Messiah and that the moment is NOW for rebellion. But Jesus is silent; Jesus does not declare Himself to be King; it was so perfect, it was so right, the whole nation was there and ripe to hear the battle cry. But the moment comes and the moment goes and Jesus does not declare Himself.

There are few things that enrage the people of God more than expecting something to happen but it doesn't happen. Failed expectations incense the faithful. The Zealots must have been incensed...and Judas with them. How could Jesus have been such a fool NOT to seize the moment when it was right within His grasp????????? Judas must have thought --"I have followed this Jesus for three years of my life now and now when the moment is ripe, now he drops the ball and fails to seize the moment!" And in that moment for Judas began the steps that led to his betrayal of his Master....

So Judas concocts a scheme. Thinks Judas --If Jesus will not on His own call for revolt and rebellion, then I shall force His hand and in such a way that He MUST declare Himself Messiah and King and MUST sound the trumpet of rebellion. I will go to the authorities, thinks Judas, and I will appear to betray Jesus, but what I am REALLY doing is forcing Jesus' hand. In the face of arrest Jesus will have to declare Himself Messiah and in the presence of soldiers He will have to summon His followers to rebel with the sword. A word from Jesus and Israel will follow Him to victory. So Judas' intention was not to betray Jesus, so much as it was to provoke Him to act and to do what Judas wanted Jesus to do. At the Last Supper when Jesus tells Judas, "*What you must do, do quickly*", Judas must think that Jesus is in on the scheme. This is not betrayal. This is motivating the Messiah to declare Himself and call for revolt.

And why Judas is going to KISS Jesus is because this is to be a sign, not of betrayal, but of loyalty and love. Judas is intending even by this seeming act of betrayal merely to reaffirm his love for his Master. The KISS is the sign of Judas' intentions --"Jesus, the intentions of my heart are not to betray but to force You to do what You MUST do..." But when Jesus says to Judas, "*Judas, would you betray the Son of man (a term for the Messiah) with a kiss.*" (v. 48) In that very instant Judas understands fully exactly what he has done. While he has intended to force God's hand in reality he has wound up betraying his Master and friend. And if Judas didn't know that in the moment of the failed kiss then he surely knew it when the rest of the disciples ask Jesus whether they should "*strike with the sword*" (v. 49) and Jesus tells them to put away their swords. His victory has nothing to do with might versus might; His victory is to be won a different way. No earthly, political crown for this Messiah; no force of arms for the Son of God. "*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit*", sayeth the Lord. Judas betrayal, you see, did not force Jesus to declare Himself as Messiah, any more than it forced Jesus to tell His disciples to take up arms against those who opposed Him. In that moment, Judas' intentions are revealed for what they truly were --betrayal, black and dastardly, pure evil, pure and simple.

How many times in our lives have we endeavored to force God's hand to do what we want God to do? God doesn't answer our prayers in a timely fashion and so we take matters into our own hands. We know better than what God is unfolding and so we lurch into the middle of it, thinking we know God's plan better than God does. We tire of waiting upon God and so we act. We tire of patiently waiting upon the Lord and so we become proactive, we take matters into our own hands, and with hubris not unlike that of Judas, we endeavor to force God's hand to do our plan, our way, according to our timeline. And may I say, may I say, when I do that I ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS mess it up. No, beloved, if we learn one thing from this story of Judas may we learn this --**it is ALWAYS God's will, God's way, according to God's time. It is NEVER our will, our way, and according to our timing...**

And what was God's will and God's way? God's will was for His only begotten Son to go to a horrible death upon a cross. God's way was the Son of man to be crucified, dead and buried and then on the third day for GOD to raise Him from the dead. Judas' plan was for Jesus to declare Himself Messiah and to call Israel to take up arms against the hated Romans. Jesus' plan was to die on the cross for the very Romans who nailed Him there. **Jesus' plan led to LIFE. Judas' plan led to betrayal.** And when the people of God actually tried to throw out the Romans their way and according to their will and timing, in 70 A.D. it resulted in the Romans destroying Jerusalem and knocking down the Temple. By contrast, Jesus' plan led to the conversion of Rome to Christianity. Who conquered Rome? Whose plan was right? And why is it, beloved, we so often take matters into our own hands thinking that we are FORCING GOD'S HAND? Never try to force God's hand lest we wind up betraying Him with a kiss. Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*