

Maundy Thursday
The Battle Is Personal
Sermon Text: Luke 22:47,48

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

Have you ever received an official-looking e-mail attachment to open in order to receive a prize? Then when you downloaded it, you soon realized your computer had become infected with a malicious code that was just waiting for you to click onto your bank account or your file with all your passwords and other personal information.

That kind of program is called a Trojan horse. It gets its name from the Trojan War between the Greeks and Trojans. The Greeks built a huge wooden horse and set it outside the walls of Troy and then left. When the Trojans saw it, they pulled it into their city. As it turned out, there were soldiers hiding inside that horse who opened the city gates at night so the returning Greek army could get in and defeat Troy.

Our text is a tragic case of one of the special 12 men who had walked beside Jesus on all those rocky paths in Israel, had heard his sermons, had watched all those miracles, had prayed with him, and had even done some mission work for him. But this man became the betrayer. The enemy Satan had inserted a Trojan horse in his heart, gained control, and turned him against Jesus.

As we examine this case, it becomes very clear how important it is that Jesus is our warrior who fought for us and, to this very day, helps us in our own battles with the devil, who wants to use our own sinful flesh against Jesus and our faith in Jesus. We realize that . . .

The Battle Is Personal

We can lock our doors to keep out thieves and robbers. We can carry mace when we jog in order to ward off attackers. But more often than not, we find that our worst war is almost always like that of Judas.

1. The struggle within Judas

It was right after Jesus and the disciples had their last meal together. They had gone out to the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. There, Jesus prayed. When he finished, he returned to his disciples, who had fallen asleep. Jesus woke them, and **“while he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’” (Luke 22:47,48).**

Matthew tells us that Judas then went up to Jesus and singled him out for the soldiers by dramatically kissing him (a traditional greeting—still done today—would have been on both sides of the face, not on lips). The kiss indicates that it was a “good buddy” greeting that was over the top. (See also Mark 14:45.)

Perhaps to some, it looked as if Judas was greeting his great friend Jesus. But the soldiers, Judas, and Jesus all knew what it really meant: He was using the display of close friendship to

betray and hand over our Savior to his enemies. Jesus even gives him two more chances, calling him by name just as he had done perhaps hundreds of times before: “Judas.” Matthew mentions that Jesus finally said, **“Do what you came for, friend” (Matthew 26:50)**. What had turned Judas from a friend into someone who could betray Jesus? What Trojan horse had entered his heart to make him a traitor within the ranks of the 12 men closest to Jesus for the past three years?

Most of you know:

- • Judas had been the treasurer for the disciples and had been helping himself to some of that money (John 12:6).
- • Satan had entered into Judas and pushed him to go to the chief priests to get paid for betraying Jesus—30 silver coins on the spot (Luke 22:3; Matthew 26:15).
- • Just a few hours earlier, Jesus had mentioned that one of the disciples would betray him (John 13:10,11) and had said it was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in Psalm 41:9. Judas was not touched by the warning.
- • During the Last Supper, we learn these terrible words yet again: **“As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, ‘What you are about to do, do quickly’” (John 13:27)**.

What a sad life. It’s obvious that Judas experienced a huge struggle inside him, especially at the end. Satan had gained control of the sinful nature within Judas and driven him to commit the worst sin that has ever been committed by someone who called himself a disciple of Jesus. Can you think of a sadder legacy than that of Judas?

When Jesus told the disciples at the Last Supper that one of them was going to betray him, did they all turn their heads to look at Judas, just as we do when we see a movie about the Last Supper? No. They didn’t know who would betray Jesus. But what did they do? I find it amazing that **“his disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant” (John 13:22)**. Why did they suspect one another? They knew their own weakness. Each had a sinful flesh that Satan could attack and use to drive them away from Jesus. Which of them could possibly do this?

Yes, the disciples knew themselves. The battle against Satan is a personal one for Judas and for all the disciples of Jesus—us too. We know . . .

2. The struggle within us.

Jesus had warned them all that they would desert him. He had given a special warning to Peter, who had strongly declared that he would never disown him. On the same night, after the disciples received the Lord’s Supper from our Savior, they all deserted him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter swung his sword, but then he also fled. Yet Peter followed the soldiers into the courtyard of the high priest. There he kept denying he was a disciple of Jesus, even to the point of swearing it. He too was a betrayer. The Trojan horse of fear in his heart was Satan’s way to turn even Peter against Jesus.

I think about this when I look at my life. You too? I ask myself, “What kind of Trojan horse will Satan use in *this* heart?” I’m just like you . . . just like Peter . . . just like St. Paul, who said,

“In my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (Romans 7:22-24).

Did you catch his reference to the spiritual war going on inside us? I so want to trust Jesus with all my heart, but my faith is under attack. My sinful flesh is weak. As Jesus told his disciples, **“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).**

And so is yours. Sometimes there is guilt from the past. You get flashbacks, and you feel dirty and unworthy of Jesus. Could it be something going on right now? Maybe you have improper thoughts and have been feeding them with the internet . . . and can’t stop. Are you living right now in disappointment? Perhaps depressing thoughts have been working against your faith. Losing your cheerful spirit in serving and giving? Have you been getting spiritually lazy? On some Sundays now, do you just choose to sleep in? It doesn’t seem to bother you as much that your personal Bible study has been slipping. And your prayer life? Or are you now in a higher income class and are finding more ways to spend weekends on trips and experiences and you no longer figure worship into your plans when you are out of town?

Do you see the Trojan horse within?

But here’s the good news:

3. Our hero loves us everyday of our lives!

We have a warrior who can help us fight these battles and sneak attacks! We agree with St. Paul: **“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25).**

There is a stronger hand on our hearts, closing the gate against Satan’s war within our hearts. Jesus is the defense against our sinful flesh and Satan’s battle for our hearts. Our betrayed Jesus never betrayed us! He went through all that physical abuse alone. And then, also alone, went before God’s judgment bar, piled high with our sins, to experience the full misery of hell in our place, with the prize in his sight of earning full forgiveness for every sin we’ve ever committed.

When Jesus voluntarily gave up his life on the cross, God cleared sinners of every charge against you, me, and of the entire world. The only thing that God sees in us is the holy, perfect life of Jesus! He has made that freely available to all who turn to him in faith.

Jesus is the starting point in our personal battle against the Trojan horse that Satan keeps trying to use against us and our faith in Jesus. We need this stronger warrior in our active battle against sin. He has given us some wonderful war weapons to help us grow stronger in faith, to become more like him, to brighten our vision of our final home in heaven, to give us a bolder life, to enlarge the daily joy we already have in him! Here are some of those weapons we have for our personal struggle against Satan and the sin within:

The first is his powerful Word with all those promises. That Word is a two-edged sword as it exposes all the stuff we try to keep hidden and, at the same time, it cuts away all the guilt as it brings Jesus into sharp focus . . . our dear Jesus, the heart of the Bible! God’s Word makes our faith stronger, and it even alerts us to the Trojan horses of Satan! It’s both our armor and offensive weapon (Ephesians 6).

Second, tonight (today), we will receive that special meal, the Lord’s Supper. Our warrior provides each of us personally with his true body and blood. It’s as close as we can possibly get

to him this side of heaven. It's as if we were in that upper room when Jesus looked at each of the disciples as he passed around the bread and the wine, assuring them in that Last Supper that he was actually touching them with his real presence. Do you see yourself there—at the end of the table? Whenever I feel like I'm slipping in my struggle with the devil, this meal points me back to Jesus. He gives me the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation that he has battled to win for me. My battle against Satan is personal, but so is this Supper: my warrior's flesh and blood with the bread and wine to strengthen me.

Third, right here, right now, the Holy Spirit is working within you with the gospel to strengthen you in your battle with Satan and sin. We are all receiving the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Together with the believers around you, we are all to be encouragers of one another. We encourage one another to stay close to Jesus and his Word so that our faith might grow and get stronger, nourished by the rich grace of God through Word and sacrament. Here we greet one another in Christ, show our concern and care for one another in conversation, and pray for one another's needs as we express our Christ-centered love in real words and real actions. At this moment, this is the best place we could possibly be!

So, fellow fully loved and fully equipped soldiers of Christ our Savior and hero, **“Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13).**

ONWARD! Amen.

Endnotes