

Entrapped in the Web of Evil

Sermon for the 1st Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: John 13:21-30



²¹ After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in His spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom He spoke. ²³ One of His disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table close to Jesus, ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom He was speaking. ²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when He had dipped the morsel, He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why He said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

Shakespeare's tragedy, *Macbeth*, is a story about how lust and greed drive two people into the abyss of evil. It all started with someone planting the idea in his heart that he should become king one day. The thought grew into a plant. And this plant bore its fruit, namely the murder of the king. The whole purpose of this murder was so that Macbeth himself could become king. The story of Macbeth didn't end there. Later, more and more people had to be killed to cover up the crime. Until Macbeth becomes a cruel dictator in the end. Macbeth and His wife, Lady Macbeth, were otherwise normal people. What Shakespeare shows in his tragedy is still shocking today. Namely that evil is normal. Criminal psychologists say the same: "what is shocking to us is that they are so normal." Criminal psychologists also report: scenes of evil are often not the dark alleys of big cities, but the evil often lurks under one's own roof and in close family circles. In our reading today, we see that evil lived under one roof with Jesus. And Jesus knew it. He knew it from the beginning. He knew what was inside Judas Iscariot, and He knew what was inside Peter, and He also knows what is inside every person. Evil is never far away. Evil is not only under one roof but is also inside each of us.

What is evil anyway? When we look at the deeds of Judas, we see wickedness. He sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. That's not a small amount. But it's also not a lot. Judging purely by the betrayal, Jesus was worth 30 pieces of silver to Judas. In order to have these 30 pieces of silver, he would even go so far as to kill Jesus. Even after hearing that Jesus was God's Son. He did all that after seeing how Jesus healed the sick and even raised the dead. After Jesus was revealed before everyone as the Messiah of God, he still sold Him for 30 pieces of silver. That is evil. But Judas didn't just sell Jesus because of the 30 pieces of silver. Like many others at that time, he was likely disappointed that Jesus, as the revealed Messiah,

didn't even want to become an earthly king. Judas didn't just sell Jesus because of 30 pieces of silver but because his faith in Jesus had failed. And as his faith failed, another plant grew in place of faith. Almost all of this was put together by John with the words: Satan entered into him. From then on, Judas went into action. But he was also driven. He was driven by Satan. And like a semi-truck without brakes, he was driven into the abyss by Satan. His feelings and his disappointed beliefs allowed nothing else. Just like in Shakespeare's tragedy, so it is with Judas' story. A spiral of evil. And when the evil starts to pick up speed, it can no longer be stopped. We can't separate ourselves from this evil. It is in the great political world affairs. It is in numerous wars. And it is under our own roof. And it is even closer still. It is also in our own hearts. That's exactly why the disciples each had to ask one after the other: "Is it me?"

And what does Jesus do? Jesus is not surprised by the evil. He knew from the beginning that He would come to His own but His own wouldn't receive Him. On the contrary: They would deny Him, ignore Him, even betray Him. And if they didn't silence Him with these things, they would eventually kill Him. Jesus knew all this and still chose the disciples. Jesus certainly didn't select only the best people so that He could demonstrate with them how a good person lives. On the contrary, Jesus chose the disciples exactly as they were. He did that so that we can still know today that Jesus came precisely for these evil people. And yet the evil didn't leave Jesus indifferent. When Jesus saw the great drama playing out, He was deeply saddened. That one of His disciples would betray Him, hurt Jesus and made Him sad. But Jesus didn't just politely ignore the evil He saw, rather He brought it to light. Where Jesus is, darkness can never stay hidden for long. Jesus confronts Judas and says to him: "what you are going to do, do quickly!" Judas can't endure Jesus addressing him so directly. He has to disappear into the night. And yet Jesus didn't stop talking with Judas. When he later wants to betray Jesus with a kiss, Jesus again speaks to him: "Do you betray me with a kiss?" Jesus wants to stop the spiral of evil. He wants us to stop believing in evil. He wants us to believe in God! And with this He wants us to believe in goodness, truth, and love! And that's why he steps into the middle of the evil. He wants to stop the speeding truck before it drives into the abyss. And He wants to stop everyone who is driving into the abyss. He also wants to stop you. I already said it at the beginning: evil is not far away. It is also in our own hearts. What happened with Judas, can happen to us. How quickly will the innocent observation of my neighbor's success become envy? And how quickly will a drop of envy turn into hatred and bloodshed? All of this is the human condition. And Jesus knows that and intervenes. Even though He knows that He will be a sacrifice. Jesus also knew that not one of His disciples would remain innocent. They would all leave Him. And yet He did not abandon them. He knew that people are evil. And He knew and knows today that there is only one single remedy against evil. And that is His precious blood shed on account of sin, death, and the devil. His last words on the cross, "It is finished!", are the last and final word against all evil. Did Judas know that these words applied to him too? We can't say for certain. He fled just like all the other disciples. In the end, he couldn't even keep the 30 pieces of silver. He was alone. And he also died alone. His story didn't have to end like that. He didn't have to close the door of his heart. When Jesus confronted him and spoke to him, it was for no other reason than to reach this dark heart and to move him to let Jesus in. Because there really is no dark place that Jesus can't go. And there is no evil that Jesus can't overcome.

The story of Jesus with His disciples is also our story. Everything that happened with the disciples could also have happened to us. There is a little bit of Peter, John, James, and yes, even a little bit of Judas in each of us. And Jesus also wants to make it clear to us what is going on in our hearts. We don't need to keep secrets in the dark chambers of our hearts. We shouldn't keep the evil others have done to us in

our hearts forever. Likewise, we should not keep the evil deeds of which we are ashamed in our hearts forever. We can let Jesus inside. There is no darkness that is too dark for Him. And there is no door that is so locked that Jesus can't get in. He wants to go there. And He also wants to speak these words over your life: "It is finished!" And when Jesus has said that, evil has nothing more to say at all. It also no longer has any power over my life. Amen.