

FOLLOWING JESUS: JESUS WARNING

John 13:21-38

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Watch/Listen: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/following-jesus-jesus-warning/

In a recent episode of the TV series “The Good Doctor,” three doctors discuss the matter of faith as they give care to a pastor, diagnosed with a terminal illness [season 2, episode 16, “Believe,” Feb. 25, 2019]. As the story unfolds, we discover that one of the doctors has given up on God. During surgery, another physician asks her, “What’s it like to lose your faith?” A pause, and then she replies, “It’s really hard. It’s like losing a really dear friend.” The doctors look up from their work on the patient and there is this long silent pause, rare on TV. Silence.

I don’t think the church has spent enough time talking honestly about people who lose their way spiritually. Our text today has Jesus warning Judas, Jesus warning Peter and Jesus warning the other ten disciples—and my extension, warning us. We all get very uncomfortable with these dark stories, but Lent seems the time to confront them.

FIRST, JUDAS (vv. 21-30). Why did Judas betray Jesus? Opinions vary. It was probably a combination of greed plus a misunderstanding of the kind of Messiah Jesus would be. If that is the case, then the warning to us is to beware of getting ahead of God and choosing violence or power over suffering and love, getting God’s things done in ungodly ways.

During that Last Supper, Jesus announces to all that one of them will betray him (v. 21). Why do it publicly? Why not just pull Judas aside? Because he wants all of us to examine ourselves for the seeds of betrayal. Also, in v. 28, Jesus offers bread to Judas, providing him one last opportunity to accept the way of suffering love. Jesus was preserving Judas’ freedom to choose. And after Judas made his choice to betray Christ, he “...went out. And it was night” (v. 30). More layered meanings in John. If this were a movie, we would see Judas slowly walking away and the darkness just absorbing him until he disappeared.

NEXT, SIMON PETER (vv. 36-38). Here is proof that good intentions to follow Jesus are not enough. Simon Peter is full of self-sufficiency (v. 37). Oh, that’s when we’d better be careful (1 Corinthians 10:12). The cock crow was what people called the third watch, or midnight to 3:00am. In other words, “Peter, your promise won’t last the night!” Thank God our salvation is not based on what we do for God but what God does for us!

Henri Nouwen wrote, “There is a twilight zone in our own hearts that we ourselves cannot see....our gifts, weaknesses, ambitions and aspirations, our motives and drives—large parts of ourselves remain in the shadow of consciousness. Other people, especially those who love us, can often see our twilight zones better than we ourselves can” [*Wounded Prophet*, by Andrew Ford, p. 74].

Jesus' warnings are warnings of love, to Judas, to Peter and to us (vv. 34-35). Think of it. Our Savior's response to betrayal is love. This is where we get the word *Maundy* for our Maundy Thursday service. It is from the Latin word for "commandment."

Full disclosure at this point: I am a firm believer in eternal security, the teaching of "once saved, always saved," that the truly converted persevere. But that biblical truth must always be balanced out by scripture's call to faithfulness and obedience. We are all just one bad choice away from blowing our witness. We are all just one bad decision away from throwing away our joy and our confident walk with the Lord.

The difference between Judas and Peter is that Peter repented. The great Catholic theologian Karl Rahner wrote that repentance is not an isolated act but a new attitude, a new direction, a whole new existence. In our Lenten language, it is following Jesus. Our loving Savior warns us. And then calls us to follow.