

TAKEN, BLESSED, BROKEN, GIVEN

Text on Maundy Thursday

April 21, 2011

Matthew 26: 17-30

Tonight we heard, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.” We suppose we know who that was. Our story names him: Judas. It is a strange name, even a tragic name. It is taken from the name of the one remaining tribe of all the original twelve of Israel, from Judah, where Jerusalem lies. The words *Jew* and *Judaism* come from *Judah*. So does Judas. If someone in our country were called Americus, you would get something of the feel of the name Judas.

Was there really a Judas? Or was the character “Judas” a creation of the first Christians who told these stories—a way for them to utter an ineradicable curse upon all their brothers who would not see Messiah in their master Jesus? I do not know the answer to that question. All of us know, however, that through every generation from the first, the church beat words into weapons to torment Jews and kill them as Judases. How unblessed are those who see others as enemies and thus preserve their righteousness.

Yet there was always a deeper meaning in the story, a different way to listen. At that table set for that last supper, when Jesus says “The one who has dipped the hand into the bowl with me will betray me”—which one was that? Which one was that *not*? Did they not all partake? Did they not all fall away? Did they not all betray? After all the evils we have worked upon this earth these two thousand years, does not Jesus’ betrayer need a new name to help us tell the story true—that is, not for self-righteousness’ sake but for our spiritual benefit?

There it is. The betrayer’s name is coming to our lips even now . . . “Christianus”—for now Christendom is the dominant tradition with the long history and the beloved scriptures. Christendom, not Judaism, is the religion besought of God to receive God’s Christ, though we turn him back. Ours is the religion which seems so often a license to make war with enemies, personal and impersonal, rather than to love them, as God’s Word so plainly asks. “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (Matt 9.13)

At our table here tonight, who is not among those bidden to dip the hand in the chalice with the Lord? Who of us has not fallen away? Who of us has not betrayed the Lord? Is there one? Have you not betrayed your Lord? Our response to this question can work like the finest barometer to mark our spiritual condition. For just as much as we defend our self, just as much as

we make our self right and another wrong, just as pointedly as we hedge our answer, as we qualify and minimize and brush up our response to Jesus' question—in just that measure, we are not trusting that God sees all, holds all, gives all, and forgives all who desire to be seen.

Yet how incomparably different and whole is that table where only sinners sit, secure not in themselves, but in God alone, in trust alone. Surely you see that the only happy church is a church of self-same sinners, disciples who have dipped their hands in the bowl with their Lord and who know together that they have fled him. The only blessed Christian is the one who has no enemy here, for only the fellowship of the fallen is blessed; it is perfect—like no other. Those who reckon not with righteousness but with remorse for all we have done that was not needful, and for all we left undone that was needful—such a people, a people of no account—they are the ones whom Jesus calls to the table this night to be made whole and happy in him.

As he took a loaf of bread, so Christ would take you out of your round of ordinary worries and hopes, where you have been distracted and small and sometimes unkind, quite unable to love. Christ would take you, just as you are without one plea; and set you apart from fear into faith and hope and love. If it lasted seven seconds, would your spurn it? Will you be taken?

Will you be blessed, just as he blessed the bread he took from its common use to his holy use? For Christ would bless you, sinner. And yet, to be blessed, you and I, we really need to let go; to let the force of God's new life crack the shell of our small self, to let our walls fall down, to let the judgments slide, to sit with sinners a sinner. Then, if you let God meet you there, you will be blessed, and you will be a blessing.

Then, friends—for no longer do I call you servants, says the Lord, but friends—then you can be broken. If you are taken by God's Christ and blessed in the fellowship of the fallen, whatever befalls you will not bring you to the pit. You for whom your life is hard, you will bring your brokenness home, here, to be healed in the strong and blessed body of Love. You for whom this life is now a satisfaction, you can be broken for others. Your heart of compassion, broken. Your wealth not held back, but generously broken. Your assumptions, your fixed beliefs, not sealed, but broken open. Will you let Christ take and bless and break you?

Will you let him give you, like bread, for the world? If you are not broken, you cannot be given. Do not hold back. Be taken and blessed, be broken for Christ and given for a whole world. This is the parable of the holy supper. We can taste it here. We live it in our homes and meeting places, at work and church, in politics and practices of all kinds—if we come to sit as sinners, one for all.

Love

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guiltie of dust and sinne.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lack'd any thing.
A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
 Love said, you shall be he.
I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
 I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?
Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
 My deare, then I will serve.
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.

—a poem of George Herbert

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