



Matthew 26:47–49

47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” 49 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

Reflection

The torchlight is dancing off the olive trees. Some of them are centuries old, but their ancient boughs watching silently on have never witnessed a scene like this. Peter's fumbling for his sword with all the training of a career fisherman. The Roman soldiers are at ease, scanning the dozen or so men in various states of alertness that they seem to have woken up. No risk here, except for the one staring them down in complete calmness, and with such presence; it's almost as if he has twelve legions of warriors standing at his beck and call, not twelve half asleep men who look like they're going to flee at any moment. The authority in his stare makes them clench their weapons tightly, despite their vastly superior numbers. The chief priests and

elders have smug looks on their faces, they're feigning outrage, as they try and suppress their smiles. They'd come because they couldn't miss this occasion. After the way this man had humiliated them in the temple courts earlier in the week, they wouldn't miss this for the world. And then, in what must be one of the most surreal scenes in all of the Bible, Judas walks forward and kisses Jesus.

Betrayed by a kiss. What strange scene is this? The tension is palpable. To fight? Or to flee? Only Jesus is calm. Both parties are filled with adrenalin; senses heighten, hackles rise, time slows down. And then Judas walks the last few steps over to Jesus,

“Greetings, Rabbi!”

And kisses him. That's how men greeted each other in Palestine in those days, in fact they still do. But he could have just pointed. Instead,

“Greetings, Rabbi!”

And he kisses him. To mock him. Not Lord, just Rabbi. Judas has never called him Lord. And everyone can see what he's come to do.

“Greetings, Rabbi”, Judas mocks.

Then he kisses him. Then the Romans surge forward to take him.

Why did he do it? Millions have asked that question since. Was it greed? Did he do

it for the money? Thirty pieces of silver wasn't that much. But the love of money can be like that, and John tells us that Judas had been skimming out of the communal money bag for some time now. Or was it jealousy? Or disappointment that Jesus wasn't turning out to be the Messiah he'd expected? Had he begun to resent having wasted three years of his life for a lost cause? We can't know for certain. All we can know with certainty is that Judas is guilty of a terrible sin which will follow him eternally. And that he's a warning to all who call themselves Christians and simply go through the motions in their 'Christian' life. As Peter later teaches us, there is no room for complacency in the Christian faith, the devil prowls around looking for Christians to devour, and we must all make every effort to make our calling and

election sure (1 Pet 5:8; 2 Pet 1:10).

Why such an armed force? Our passage describes them as a large crowd armed with swords and clubs. Included amongst them was the temple guard, most likely a contingent of Roman soldiers assigned by Pilate for temple security. They were authorized to carry short-doubled edged swords used for hand-to-hand combat; and they knew how to use them. Those carrying clubs were most likely the temple police and personal security guards of the chief priests and elders, the ones who'd come to an arrangement with Judas. Surely this is overkill when it comes to surprising twelve mostly unarmed men in the middle of the night, with the intention of only arresting one of them? And yet this one had not stopped talking about the

kingdom of God since he'd entered Jerusalem, and talk like this during Passover could well mean revolution. Huge crowds had welcomed Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem like the coming of a king and he'd held larger crowds still spellbound in the temple courts by his preaching. Just a word from Jesus would have meant revolution, a popular uprising in a city filled close to six times its usually capacity in anticipation of the Passover festival. Better not to take any chances. Better to take him in the dead of the night in a remote area, to catch them by surprise with a large armed force while they're sleeping.

Only Jesus wasn't sleeping. He was waiting, praying and preparing himself. It may be that he had been watching them come. Gethsemane is on the western side of the

Mount of Olives. From there you have a great view of Jerusalem. It may be that while his disciples were sleeping Jesus saw the torch lights of the approaching party, against the soft glow of Jerusalem, as they made their way out of the city, across the Kidron valley and began to ascend the Mount of Olives.

How was Jesus so calm? As we saw yesterday, it's because he prayed. Three times Jesus prayed. Here's what he prayed, firstly,

“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

And then the second and third time, he prayed these identical words,

“My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

Do you notice that Jesus prayed three times to his Father, ‘may your will be done.’ That’s how he was so calm.

The twelfth century Italian poet Dante wrote of God’s will, ‘In His will is our peace.’ That’s how Jesus could remain so calm. He was at peace with the will of God for his life. Just as he’d taught his disciples to pray. ‘Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’ God’s kingdom is coming, as his will is done, by Jesus in this moment. And because of this moment, one day soon, God’s will, will be universally done on earth as it is in heav-

en.

Think

Take a moment now to inwardly digest this scene. That fateful kiss. The intensity of the moment. The prospect of imminent bloodshed. The wash of emotions. Hatred, gloating, mockery, fear, resolve and ... peace. One man, an island amongst all of this. One man at peace, resting in the will of God. Not imminent bloodshed, only his blood would be shed. Yet he is at peace, resting in the will of God.

Are you at peace? You can experience a peace like this as well. Jesus said in John 16,

‘In this world you will have trouble.

But take heart! I have overcome the world.'

We too can have peace amidst a world of trouble. By resting in the will of God like Jesus did in this moment. Jesus has overcome the world. It's just a matter of time. God's kingdom will come and his will will be done on earth as it is in heaven because of what Jesus has done for us.

Pray

Spend some time praying over this passage to close our time today. Pray for the grace that you need to give yourself completely over to the will of God for your life so that you can experience the peace that is ours in the Jesus. And find rest today in that quote from Dante,

‘In His will is our peace; it is the sea into which all things are drawn by Him who created all the works of Nature’ (Dante, *Paradise* 3:85–87)