

*“Spring Cleaning: Everywhere”*  
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Palm Sunday, March 29, 2015  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Mark 11: 1-11 and John 13: 21-30

**Mark 11: 1-11**

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, [Jesus] sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. 3 If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’ ” 4 They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, 5 some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” 6 They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

**John 13: 21-30**

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another uncertain of whom he was speaking.

One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.”

So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.”

Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival”; or, that he should give something to the poor.

So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

*This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.***

For as far back as I can remember

I've associated Christian faith with social  
responsibility.

Maybe it was from hearing the stories of Jesus,  
stories of a suffering servant constantly, lovingly,  
graciously reaching out  
to the lost, the last, and the least,  
inviting folks into His life and inviting  
Himself into ours.

Maybe it is because of the passion and commitment  
here in this significant church  
for living out the Gospel with a vibrant and  
loving faith  
that is experienced through our many  
ministries  
of hospitality, healing and hope.

Maybe it was because my home congregation practiced a  
social gospel,

believing and singing, preaching and practicing a  
Christian faith

that is grounded in the context of serving  
people in need.

Maybe it was because of one Sunday without dry, uncooked  
macaroni and Elmer's Glue.

When my brothers and I went to have church

we would jingle the coins in our pockets for the  
offering in Sunday School,

and when we left church we would invariably  
carry home

our arts and crafts project that we had  
made in Sunday School.

And, I swear, it was always some creative use of dry,  
uncooked macaroni

stuck with Elmer's Glue on a white paper plate,  
art supposedly in the shape of Jesus or Moses,  
church steeples or sheep.

Every now and then we would expand beyond expectations  
and get to make a dry, macaroni *sculpture!*...that  
rested on a white paper plate.

Or, if we were really, truly blessed,  
we strung the dry, uncooked macaroni on a thread  
and made a necklace.

Then we got to proudly wear our faith around  
our neck.

So you can imagine my delight the day this nine-year-old  
was told by a Sunday School teacher  
that arts and crafts would not consist of mac  
and glue.

Instead everyone would get to make a personal banner,  
which we would carry and show to the whole city  
when we paraded the next Sunday to the Easter  
Dawn Service.

My classmates each got a piece of 12" by 12" square felt cloth,  
and started to cut out egg shapes and cross shapes to  
decorate their banners.

One classmate started to make cut outs of animals going two-  
by-two into an ark,

and quickly got pulled aside by the teacher  
for some additional instruction on the nuance  
of Jesus' resurrection.

I looked at the blank piece of felt and pictured an image  
burned into my heart

from a passage of Scripture that had been read in  
church,

a passage that stuck with me and floated there  
in my mind,

being teased and played with,  
quietly meditated upon as I went  
about living.

(Don't let anyone tell you that children cannot contemplate  
theology.)

Scissors sliced through felt and there quickly emerged  
an image of two right hands approaching from  
opposite sides of the banner,  
each holding a piece of bread,  
each preparing to dip into a common  
bowl.

When nine letters forming four words were added above,  
the banner was ready for show and tell on the Day of  
Resurrection.

The next Sunday we paraded from our church  
to the site of the ecumenical outdoor Easter Dawn  
Service.

We stood in a circle around the empty tomb  
and then a lady stood in the middle of our circle and  
said,

*"He is not here! He is risen!"*

We sang "Christ the Lord is Risen Today!"

and I held up my little banner that asked, "Is it I,  
Lord?"

"Is it I, Lord?"

That question has legs.

"Is it I, Lord?" has stood the test of time.

Our Scriptures for today offer a conversation that is in  
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

In Mark and Matthew the disciples speak directly to Jesus,  
asking, wondering, pleading to know whether they are

the ones to betray Him.

In both Luke and John we overhear the Gospel,  
observing as the troubled disciples interact and  
converse together.

John 13 reads: *After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit,  
and declared,*

*“Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.”*

*The disciples looked at one another uncertain of  
whom he was speaking.*

“Is it I, Lord?” still shakes us to our core.

Consider that every time we have Holy Communion  
we repeat Jesus’ words at the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11:  
23-24):

*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you,  
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took  
bread,  
and when he had given thanks,  
he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”*

When we gather at the Lord’s Table and re-live the Last  
Supper,

the Holy Eucharist is offered to one and all with love  
and forgiving grace,

and we make sure to mention the betrayal.

We recall that on the night He was betrayed,

Jesus dipped His hands into the common bowl with a  
follower and friend

who also dipped into and shared the common  
bowl,

one who partook the Bread of Life and  
the Cup of Salvation.

We remember the betrayal...and the betrayer.  
We remember the one who sold information to the  
authorities  
    so that they might arrest Jesus somewhere quiet,  
        somewhere away from the crowds who might  
defend him.

The authorities needed someone to identify their leader,  
    which tells us how common and normal our suffering  
servant leader looked.

    (Possibly not as hot and hunky as he is  
portrayed on a recent TV melodrama.)

We remember the one who betrayed Jesus,  
    and we will not let it go  
        nor do we let him back into the fold.

History is written by saints and winners;  
    Judas is cast as the loser and sinner.

We tend to forget and overlook an inconvenient truth,  
    that when Jesus said in the Upper Room, "*One of you  
here will betray me,*"

everyone present said, "*Is it I, Lord?*"

We all have it in us to do incredible acts of mercy and love,  
    and we have the capacity to do evil, to betray Christ  
and one another.

This is a universal truth: God's love is everywhere.  
Everywhere we go, there we are,  
    bearing with us the capacity to do evil  
        as well as the grace to be forgiven and live with  
love.

*"Is it I, Lord?"*

If you go to the Upper Room in Nashville,  
you may sit in a lovely chapel  
and admire a wooden carving of De Vinci's Last  
Supper.

The day my family went our tour guide pointed out the  
twelve posts on the altar rail;  
eleven posts were named for the disciples and one  
was for St. Paul.

What?

Eleven disciples?

We thought there were twelve...

There is no altar rail for Judas.

Judas has been cast out of the Upper Room;  
betrayers and sinners need not apply.

When I saw that, heard that, and let it sink in,

I felt as if I, too, was cast off and cast away and cast  
aside.

They say the Church is the only army that shoots its  
wounded.

More and more often our congregation is welcoming home  
folks

who are walking wounded,

folks who feel as betrayed by the church as by  
anyone else.

"Is it I, Lord?"

Are you like me, feeling far too often like the disciples at the  
Last Supper,

being uncertain of whom Jesus was speaking...

because he could have been speaking about  
me...about you...about us...

We can all relate,

for when it comes to asking Jesus whom to judge and  
pin the blame,

whom we can point a finger at,  
we discover that four of our own fingers  
point right back at us.

We can all relate,

for we have known what it's like to betray someone  
else's trust,

and to feel betrayed by someone we trusted.

We can all relate,

for we know the pain of being undercut and undone  
and burned

by those we love and put our trust in,  
and we also know the pain of admitting, disclosing, and  
confessing

before God and one another that we have  
broken vows,

leaked confidences, let friends down,  
forgotten promises,

abandoned what was entrusted to  
us,

dismissed what was once a  
sacred trust.

You can only be betrayed by those whom you trust;

you can only betray others who have put their trust in  
you.

We know this pain.

We have a sense of what Jesus must have felt;

we also know what Judas must have felt;

we also know what all the disciples must have  
felt

when they asked, "Is it I, Lord?"

This morning we are richly blessed by the Dance Team from  
Charles R. Drew Charter School.



Thank you, again, for your presence and prayers.  
Right down the street from their fine school is Columbia  
Theological Seminary,  
that outstanding divinity school where future Sunday  
School teachers  
learn how to make arts and crafts projects  
out of dry, uncooked macaroni and  
Elmer's Glue.

At Columbia Seminary a student dormitory overlooks the  
school commons.

In one of the windows is a sign that reads,  
*"Seminary Students Please Do Not Walk On Water"*

Please don't walk on water.  
Please don't point fingers at sinners or cast away betrayers.  
Please don't be so hard on yourself; be good to you and to  
one another.

Please do let Jesus forgive you and through you to forgive  
one another.

Please do remember that when Jesus returned from life after  
life

the very first thing he did was to forgive Peter and  
those who had betrayed Him.

Please do make room and make space and make a home  
for the lost, the last and the least,  
for the abandoned and the abandoners,  
the victims and the victimizers.

You and I know all too well what betrayal feels like, sounds  
like, smells like, hurts like,

And, yes, deep down inside we already know the answer to  
our question,

"Is it I, Lord?"

*Yes, it's-a-me, Lord, it's-a-me standing in the need of  
prayer.*

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy  
Spirit. Amen!*