

## Communion Meditation: “Surely Not I, Lord?”

Matthew 26: 20-25 – February 5, 2011

<sup>20</sup>When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; <sup>21</sup>and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” <sup>22</sup>And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” <sup>23</sup>He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. <sup>24</sup>The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” <sup>25</sup>Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

I know who you are. One of you put me in an awkward, embarrassing place. You recently wrote down your friend’s name on our pew register as attending worship, along with his wife. I called to welcome them and see how I could follow up, and there was an awkward silence on the other end of the conversation. He told me that he was still in high school, did not have a wife and had not attended worship at Second Baptist! We began to piece the story together and figured out that one of his friends from Collegiate, where he used to attend, probably did this as a practical joke. We figured out he was probably a senior. And we figured out who you are.

So I am going to call out your name in a moment and ask you to stand up. . . . Not really! I don’t even know who you are. I am not upset, just the opposite. I had a good laugh with the polite young man I called. And we agreed that it was a pretty good practical joke and deserved one in response! So, that was my holy gotcha!

I am really not wasting pulpit time on a practical joke. I thought such a “gotcha” moment could produce a good illustration of how every one of the twelve disciples felt around that Last Supper table. As I began to incriminate this jokester, he – or she, I suppose – was the only person in here who began to feel uncomfortable. But as Jesus began to incriminate his traitor at the Last Supper table, all twelve disciples felt their blood pressure spike, their faces flush, their pulses quicken and their guilt leap out!

“One of you will betray me.” “Surely not I, Lord?” And then it was the next one’s turn: “Surely not I, Lord?” And the next, and the next until eleven disciples openly confessed the potential of such betrayal with their question. And then Judas – the one sitting close enough to dip his hand in the same bowl with Jesus, apparently the last one to speak as the soul-searching finished circling the table – Judas questioned, “Surely not I, Rabbi?”

The eleven raised the exact same question as Judas. They called Jesus “Lord,” not “Rabbi,” as Judas did. That was a pretty major difference in title that I want to come back to in a moment. But otherwise, the eleven echoed Judas’ confession! Let me brush off my Greek to drive that home and let you hear the haunting rhythm and ugly poetry of unanimous confession of the potential of betrayal: “*Meti ego eimi, Kurie?*” “*Meti ego eimi, Kurie?*” “*Meti ego eimi, Kurie?*” “*Meti ego eimi, Rabbi?*”

Just 34 verses later in this chapter, after Jesus’ arrest in the Garden, Matthew makes the cryptic comment that surely is meant to connect the Garden to the Upper Room confession: *Then all the disciples deserted him and fled (26:56).*

Worship – perhaps particularly this worshipful table – invites us to see God – to declare “holy, holy, holy!” But worship also calls us to see ourselves, to see ourselves as God sees us, to admit our sin in the presence of our holy God. We all know there is evil within our hearts. God says the same thing to us that God said to Cain while his anger was plotting the murder of his

brother, Abel. God said, “*Sin is lurking at the door*” (Gen. 4:7). “Lurking” – it is the Hebrew word used for a crouching animal ready to pounce and destroy.

Temptation is not something to be toyed with – to entertain and cuddle. That would be like opening the door and trying to pet a wild lion that is crouching outside. The Bible tells us to resist the devil, to treat him like the ravaging lion that he is. That is why we pray earnestly every week the way our Lord taught us to pray: “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*” I don’t think Judas prayed every day the way the Lord taught him. Luke tells us that Judas *became a traitor (6:16)*. He did not start out that way. But after toying with the lion, trying to domesticate him and pet him, finally sin jumped through the door and devoured.

The other eleven must have been better prayers than Judas. Despite their common potential for betrayal with Judas, they did not. In fact, tradition says that all of them became great leaders in the church and all but John were martyred. Around that table was not only the unanimous potential of sin and betrayal, there was also the potential of faithfulness and heroism. And I think the difference between the other eleven and Judas is shown in their calling Jesus “Lord” and Judas calling Jesus “Rabbi.” The Lord was in charge of their lives, despite their betrayal and desertion. The Lord had taught them to pray. But Judas became a traitor because he did not pray well and he petted the lion.

Paul said that before we partake of the Lord’s Supper we should first examine ourselves. This table remains as it was from the first, a place of bald honesty, of open confession. A place that calls us out by name, that incriminates us all. A place that reveals us all as the sinners that we are. A place that teaches us to pray as the Lord taught us to pray, and so helps to transform us into the faithful, heroic disciples *Kurie*, the Lord, calls us to be!