



John tells us his soul was troubled.¹ The hour was upon him, the hour of his betrayal and death. It was the hour of his troubled soul in the reigning night of Judas' betrayal, his leaving early and his evil kiss.² It was the hour of our failure to remain with Jesus in his agony, our failure even to remain awake in prayer.³

Jesus knew the weakness and failure of those he called his friends. "Do you now believe?" Jesus asked his confident disciples. "The hour is coming...when you will leave me alone, when you will be scattered," Jesus said to those same disciples.⁴ He said this in the darkness while Judas was gathering his silver and losing his soul. He said this just hours before Peter, warming himself by the fire, would say "I do not know," just as they were beating Jesus, binding him in mockery.⁵ This is the night, when after Judas' kiss, Jesus said to the violent, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness."⁶ Like a lamb led to the slaughter.⁷

We have entered the days of universal darkness. We have entered the confusion, wickedness, division, and betrayal of sinners and violence, entered the drama of ancient sin and the hatred of God. And as this drama unfolds before us in word and liturgy, we see our own hatred and our own pride. Don't think yourself any better than Judas. Don't consider yourself any stronger than Peter. Each one of us has betrayed, all alike denied. Don't let the old and storied quality of this gospel hide the fact that this tale of Peter's denial, the disciples' abandonment, and Judas' betrayal is also our story. We are like they were. We deny. We abandon. We betray. The story of God is sometimes dark because of us, because of our sin and hate. He is light.⁸ We are darkness.

But what else is there to know? Does the gospel just point out our failure? Is it the gospel merely to point out that we are the darkness of this world? (How blind and arrogant that we blame God for our violence!) What else is there to know?

After his struggle with the scribes and Pharisees in the Temple, Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets...how often I have longed to gather your children together!"⁹ Earlier, in the darkness of Nicodemus' safety, Jesus spoke of his crucifixion and explained it by saying, "For God so loved the world..."¹⁰ And although his soul was troubled, and although he had been betrayed and would be denied, Jesus said to his weak and worried disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."¹¹ Although abandoned, Jesus said, "I shall not leave you..."¹² He said these things in the darkness to those who would leave him because of fear and sin. Jesus is the light of the world, and we are the darkness. And that's hope.

¹ John 12:27

² John 13:30; Mark 14:44-45

³ Mark 14:37

⁴ John 16:31-32

⁵ Matthew 26:70; cf. John 18:15-27

⁶ Luke 22:53

⁷ Isaiah 53:7

⁸ 1 John 1:5

⁹ Matthew 23:37

¹⁰ John 3:16

¹¹ John 14:1

¹² John 14:18

It is the constant testimony of the gospels that even in the face of satanic darkness, even in the face of failure, weakness, and wickedness, even in this world we've made more like hell than heaven, even in our own lives broken as they may be, even in this, Jesus still loves. This is the gospel: that in the hour of betrayal and failure, Jesus said, "Father, the hour has come: glorify your son..."¹³ This is the gospel: that just before he was arrested, beaten, bound, and killed, Jesus said to his disciples, "I have conquered the world."¹⁴ This is the gospel: that on the cross he said to the good thief, "today you will be with me in paradise."¹⁵ This is the gospel: that moments before his arrest and abandonment, Jesus prayed to his Father that those who were fleeing would "be with me where I am, so that they may always see my glory."¹⁶ This is the gospel: that God loves you even in your sin and failure. He loves you so much that even though you run from the just sentence of your own sins, he stays behind and dies the death that belonged to you. This is the gospel.

What then should we do? In this coming week when this tale is told, when this gospel is announced in churches throughout the world, when you are asked as faithful Christians to gather together on Thursday and Friday in honor and memory of the Lord's passion, what should you do? Hear the Lord's own words: "My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death; remain here and watch with me."¹⁷ While his disciples were fleeing, Jesus, like a jilted lover, was simply begging them to stay. Remain, watch, pray, be faithful; Jesus begged his friends to remain by his side. He even prayed to his Father that they remain with him; but even so, most of them ran away.¹⁸ He died lonely, asking only that you remain with him.

So what should you do? This week, this holy Thursday, this Good Friday, what are your plans? What should you do? This: remain with Jesus.

If we're disciples of Jesus, we should be like Mary and John and follow him to the cross. Do not be like Judas, abandoning Jesus on Thursday. Do not be like Peter, denying him on Friday. Be faithful. Follow Jesus to the cross. Gather in this church to hear the word of God and receive the gift of Jesus' body and blood. Do not fool yourself into thinking something else more important. Don't risk your soul. Do not dare sing with the angels on Easter Sunday after being too busy to weep with Mary on Good Friday. Do not mock God. We have left the Lord alone enough. See him now, this week. Follow him finally now, this week. Come, because Jesus asks you.

Follow him to the cross, for only in beholding his death will you ever be given his life. Come and adore him. *Amen.*

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¹³ John 17:1

¹⁴ John 16:33

¹⁵ Luke 23:43

¹⁶ John 17:24

¹⁷ Matthew 26:38

¹⁸ John 17:24