

**Week 3: “Day after day I was with you” (Mark 14:49)**

This week’s midweek meditation takes up Jesus’ betrayal by Judas in three images made across a period of fifteen hundred years, through the late classical world, the European Baroque world, and the modern African world. This span of time and space is especially appropriate for this week’s theme because human betrayal is universal human sin.

The way of the cross begins with Jesus’ invitation, “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*” (Mark 8:34). Jesus invites us to a lifetime journey of discipleship following him. Day after day we follow the one who suffered betrayal so that we might know we are not alone in our own human suffering.

Jesus was betrayed by his friend Judas with a kiss. In each of the synoptic gospels Judas used a kiss as the sign by which he identified Jesus for arrest. This kiss of betrayal is a sign of human disloyalty and unfaithfulness, leading to Jesus’ suffering and death. It is a sign of broken human confidence and trust. A kiss of betrayal stands in contrast with New Testament writings that refer to a holy kiss of greeting in the context of Christian community (see Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Pet. 5:14). Early church liturgies expressly mention the exchange of a “kiss of peace” as a sign of the reconciliation we share in Christ Jesus. This practice continues in our own Lutheran liturgy in the sharing of the peace, preparing our hearts to receive the Eucharist. Day

after day Jesus is with us granting us his peace so that we might live in peace with others.



In the image to the right, Judas arrives in the garden while Jesus speaks to his disciples. Judas approaches Jesus saying, “*Hail, Master!*” (Mt. 26:49), words that indicated faithfulness, yet allowed Judas to betray Jesus. After the betrayal Mark writes, “*they laid hands upon him and seized him*” (Mk. 14:46). Yet Jesus did not respond with hostility. Rather, by saying “*No more of this!*” he condemned any retribution for his arrest, instead

offering healing to the one who had been injured by Peter’s blow with the sword. Jesus said to them as a group, “*When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour and the power of darkness*” (Lk. 22:53).

The image above is a sixth century mosaic from the Basilica di San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy. The mosaics in this chapel reveal the influence of Byzantine iconography and its theological understanding of Christ. The mosaic above is rendered in the style of a Byzantine icon in which Jesus is depicted as “*Christ Pantocrator*” (Christ Almighty), Jesus revealed in the unity of his humanity and divinity. Though Judas is clothed in the garment of righteousness, as are the other disciples to the right, he has placed himself on the side of those who would arrest Jesus. Judas reveals the sin of human hypocrisy, appearing righteous and offering a holy kiss to Jesus, yet acting as the power of darkness.



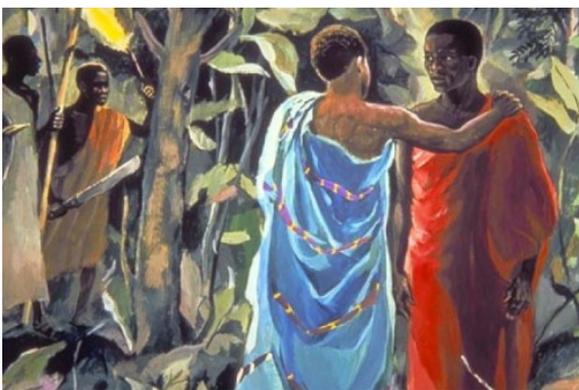
The second image this week is of Caravaggio's "*The Taking of Christ*" (c. 1602, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin). Rendered in the Baroque style, Jesus' red garment reveals his divinity, while the blue garment reveals his humanity. Characteristic of Caravaggio, light illuminates the darkness, witnessing to Jesus as "*the light of the world*" (Jn. 8:12). Caravaggio portrays Jesus as the one who overcomes "*the power of darkness.*" The soldiers are shown in armor of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, contextualizing the biblical story

for the viewer. This is a reminder that just as translations of the Bible are updated every generation, so too artists also have always rendered Christ in their own age and context so that we might see the Word made flesh.

Caravaggio has painted Jesus' hands outstretched and clasped indicating nonresistance to his arrest. As Christ is taken, the disciple to the left appears to implore heaven for the unjust taking of his teacher and Lord.

The third image below is from "*The Life of Jesus Mafa*" (*Vie de Jesus Mafa*) a collection of paintings made in Cameroon in the 1970s. French Catholic missionary François Vidil worked with Mafa Christians to create a collection of works indigenizing the gospel story into the local Cameroonian context. It is significant that Christ is shown as African rather than European, yet robed in red, the classical symbol of Christ's divinity, while Judas is robed in blue, the symbol of humanity. As above, the concern of these artists is to tell the biblical story by placing the humanity and suffering of Jesus within contexts that reveal Jesus' shared humanity with us.

When Jesus invites us to follow him, he knows our sin, sufferings and loneliness; he knows



our need of light and hope in the darkness. Whether we have been a betrayer or been betrayed, Jesus' call to follow him is a call to a new point of departure each day whereby he offers us forgiveness and new life in him.

Jesus is the one who, though he was betrayed, did not resist suffering and did not seek revenge. Jesus' betrayal reminds us of Job, who said of his suffering, "*my relatives have failed me; and my friends have abandoned me*" (Job 19:14). In Matthew, the

disciples all forsook Jesus and fled after his arrest (Mt. 26:56). Just as the disciples could not remain with Jesus in prayer, they also abandoned him to the power of darkness.

Paul writes, "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people. Do not take revenge*" (Rom 12:17-18a). "*Day after day*" Jesus calls us out of our own darkness and the dark places that our worry and fears take us so that we might be signs of peace and light for one another. By dwelling in our shared humanity, Jesus reminds us of what our humanity is truly capable of as we seek to follow him and live for others. Amen.