

## Betrayers All

He never thought of himself as a betrayer. He really despised Caiaphas and Annas, those corrupt old religionists, in league with the Empire. He despised all the priests, but these two were worthy of a special sort of hatred. He carefully laid a trap, using their own hatred of Jesus against them. "What will you give me, if I betray him to you?"

They offered the standard rate and he shook his head. Of course, money was not the issue, but they couldn't possibly know that. What he had to pull them in so delicately that they would never know he was only using them to fulfill the will of God. Judas Ben Iscariot knew the ancient scriptures. He knew that the people rarely chose the ones that God had chosen as leaders. It took a real prophet to reveal a real king. And he believed that Jesus of Nazareth should be king.

For three long years they had traveled together and now, finally the time seemed right. Jesus had been hinting for awhile that their trip to Jerusalem would bring on some sort of crisis. Only Ben Iscariot, alone among the disciples, knew what that crisis was. For he was its cause.

He knew that he was part of a grand cosmic plan to bring down the hopelessly bankrupt caste who kept his people in slavery to their ancient religious rituals and subject to the boots of Rome. Soon, Jesus would have to stand up to them, tell them who he really was, and the Holy One would send the Angels and restore the Kingdom to Israel. "I'll let you know what to do," he replied, slipping the thirty silver coins into his purse.

He never thought of himself as a betrayer. Not when their fingers touched when they dipped their pitas into the bowl of salty gravy. Not when their eyes locked for a brief moment after Jesus said "One of you is a traitor."

He never blinked, looking Jesus squarely in the eye and whispering, "You don't think it's me, do you?" For he was not weak, not like Peter and the rest, frightened as they were of collaborators' swords, frightened to do what was necessary to bring in the Kingdom.

Jesus raised one eyebrow. "I'll take your word for it."

He never saw himself as a betrayer. Not when he led the guards through the dark garden and kissed Jesus. Not when Peter lunged at the High Priest's cowardly servant, his own sword glinting in the torchlight. Not when they surrounded Jesus

and led him away through the night. Not until the Sanhedrin broke up and the police led Jesus away to the Praetorium did he begin to panic. Something had gone terribly wrong. For Jesus was still silent about who he was. The night sky was dark and silent, not an angel in sight.

And when the crowd started yelling for Barabbas, he felt his soul go dark, empty as the sky. His plan in shambles, his friend facing certain death, the Kingdom still unborn. Before the sun rose, he found himself tying a rope tight around his neck.

Peter never saw himself as a betrayer either. He sang the hymns that night with a conviction he had never before known. He patted his sword as they went out into the night for some air. And when he used it, he knew that he was defending the Messiah of God.

And when that little wench tried to betray *him*, he changed his accent to the clipped southern style, affecting an air of annoyed puzzlement, so he could stay close to the action, so he could use that sword to free his Master from these godless fools. Later, when the crowd turned menacingly toward him, he faced them squarely. "I have no idea what you're talking about." As he turned away, he heard the rooster crow. He choked back his tears, until the crowd could see him no longer, his heart breaking into a million little pieces.

The crowd never saw themselves as betrayers either. Not when they'd cried, "Hosanna! Blessed is the One come in the Name of the Lord!" Not when they stood around the courtyard and cried out for Barabbas to be released. Not when they'd threatened the guards and shook their fists at Pilate. They were a free people, unbowed before the oppressor.

For that's how it is with betrayal. Trying to cover our own failure, we justify betrayal. We cast it as something else, something noble or good. Something necessary. Something that must end well, no matter the blood staining our hands.

We start our walk towards Golgotha this week, aware that, once again, we have betrayed our Master. We have betrayed him in not only with our lips, but in our lives. Ours is not the betrayal of an Aldrich Ames or a Benedict Arnold, for they only betrayed a nation. We have betrayed the Son of Man.

We never thought of ourselves as betrayers. But then we look down at the hammer in our hands, and we look up the figure on the cross. Those are our whip marks, the bruises of our fists. That's our spit running down his cheeks.

We have betrayed him in the breaking of our promises. We have betrayed him in our refusal to defend the poor and the sick. We have betrayed him in the poisoning of our air and water, in the destruction of our planet. We have betrayed

him in our unrepentant embrace of a culture which values wealth above all. We have betrayed him all the way to a cold, dark grave and rolled a stone in front to keep it sealed from the light.

We have betrayed Life Itself. No wonder our hearts break. No wonder we can't keep the tears back. No wonder that inside we feel empty and afraid.

No wonder it will take all the might of the Almighty to set it right. And we never even thought of ourselves as betrayers.