

“Well, now it’s personal!” I can recall those words from my childhood. They seemed to be said when a hero in a film was no longer simply fighting to fulfil an obligation to the calling but when the villain struck close to home, harmed a family member, killed a friend. It was usually the turning point in the film where the action turned in the hero’s favor and all was made right.

It’s not always that way. Many fighters will try to “get in each other’s heads”. If they can make something personal, they can take them from the realm of tactical fighter to flailing flurry of fist that they can easily dismantle and defeat.

I don’t think it can get any more personal for our Savior as He makes His way to the cross. It’s His skin in the game. It’s His blood that will be spilt, His life given on the cross. But in the words set before us, we begin to count the stakes for ourselves. We see our own weakness. As, we peer at Judas we realize that **The Battle Is Personal**.

You see, we can lock our doors and put on masks to ward off viruses. We can take defense classes and carry mace in order to ward off thugs and attackers. We can have the perfect plan for every situation in life but then, we find that our worst diseases, our worst enemies, they come from within and can’t be kept away. It gets personal!

The contents of what we think of as Maundy Thursday evening are vast. There are the events of the upper room, the Passover, the Lord’s Supper, the washing of feet, the departure of Judas. There is the walk to Gethsemane with all the teaching Jesus does along the way in the book of John. But today, we are in the garden, in Gethsemane at the base of the mount of Olives. Jesus has done His praying, the disciples have done their sleeping and now, well now, Jesus woke them, and **“while he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’” (Luke 22:47,48).**

Perhaps to some, it looked as if Judas was greeting his friend. But the soldiers, Judas, and Jesus all knew what it really meant: He was using the display of friendship to betray our Savior to His enemies. Jesus even reaches out to him, calls him by name just as He had done hundreds of times before: “Judas.” Matthew mentions that Jesus finally said, **“Do what you came for, friend” (Matthew 26:50).**

How? What had entered Judas’ heart to make him a traitor within the ranks of the 12 men closest to Jesus for the past three years?

Most of you know:

- Judas had been the treasurer for the disciples and had been helping himself to some of the money (John 12:6).
- Satan had entered into Judas and pushed him to go to the chief priests to get paid for betraying Jesus—30 silver coins on the spot (Luke 22:3; Matthew 26:15).
- Just a few hours earlier, Jesus had mentioned that one of the disciples would betray him (John 13:10,11) and had said it was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in Psalm 41:9. Judas seems unphased by the warning, at least for now. During the events of the upper room, hear those terrible words: **“As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, ‘What you are about to do, do quickly’” (John 13:27).**

It is obvious that Judas experienced a huge internal struggle, especially at the end. One wonders what all must have been going through His head. Did He think Jesus would flex that almighty muscle and get away? Did he think the leaders would have their fun, rough Jesus up a little and let Him go? But when He sees what is actually going to happen, the guilt is more than Judas can bear. Tossing the coins back at the leaders of Israel, he runs off and kills himself. The Scriptures tell us Judas goes where He belongs (Acts 1:25).

But when Jesus told the disciples around the table that one of them was going to betray Him, did they all turn their heads to look at Judas? Of Course not. They didn't know who would betray Jesus. **"His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them He meant" (John 13:22).** Why did they suspect one another? They knew their own weakness. Each had a sinful flesh that Satan could attack and use to drive them away from Jesus. Which of them could possibly do this? Consider what goes through their heads as one by one they began to make the statement that must have come out with that tinge of uncertainty, **"Surely not I, Lord (Matthew 26:22)."** You're not talking about me, are You Jesus? The disciples knew themselves. The battle against Satan is a personal one for Judas and for all the disciples of Jesus, us included.

In fact, Jesus had warned all the disciples that they would desert Him. He had given a special warning to Peter, who had strongly declared that he would never disown Him. But on the same night, they all did exactly as Jesus said they would. Peter swung his sword, but then, he also fled. Sure, he doubled back and followed the soldiers into the courtyard of the high priest. But then you remember how that turned out. He too was a betrayer. Fear, this time, not money, was Satan's way to turn even bold and brash Peter against Jesus.

I think about this when I look at my life. "Me too?" I ask myself, "What will Satan use with me?" I'm just like you . . . just like Peter . . . just like Paul, who said, **"In my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:22-24).**

Did you catch his reference to the spiritual war going on inside us? I so want to trust Jesus with all my heart, but my faith is under attack. My sinful flesh is weak. As Jesus told his disciples, **"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).**

But here's the good news: We have a warrior! We agree with St. Paul: **"Thanks be to God, (He gives us the victory) through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25).**

You see, our betrayed Jesus never betrayed us! He went through all that physical abuse alone. And then, also alone, stood before God's judgment seat, piled high with our sins, to experience the full misery of hell in our place. He had only one goal in mind, earning full forgiveness for every sin we've ever committed.

When Jesus voluntarily gave up His life on the cross, God cleared sinners of every charge, those against you, me, and of the entire world. The only thing that God sees in us is the holy, perfect life of Jesus! We are saved because God made it personal when He sent His Son to save us from sin.

Jesus is so much more than just the starting point in our personal battle against powers of evil around us. He is the entire battle. In Baptism, you were marked as God's own, connected to all this Warrior has done for you through God's gracious gift of faith. In Word, just as in His Supper, the Holy Spirit works within you, granting, and giving the promises not just tools but the victory itself: forgiveness of every sin, new life to live even now, salvation with the hope of an eternity far from sin and its consequences, safest at home with Jesus forever. Wrapped in the Means of Grace we are wrapped in Christ Himself even though the battle would get personal every day.

So, fellow soldiers, the battle is truly personal. But then so is the victory supplied for us in Christ, our Savior and hero. Standing in the Means of Grace, which root us in that victory given and supplied by Jesus, well perhaps Paul said it best, **"Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13).** Amen!