

Mysterious Glory  
a Maundy Thursday sermon from John 13  
by Phil Henry, Thursday April 9, 2009

Desert Springs PCA, Tucson AZ

Maundy Thursday is a traditional Christian celebration of Jesus' last meal with his disciples. The word "Maundy" comes from the Latin word for "mandate," referring to the new command Jesus gives in John 13—the command to love one another.

We often think of ourselves as being pretty loving, and pretty loveable people. My main point this evening will be that we are more like Judas than we care to admit.

**Last month, Michael McLendon, a man with no criminal record, began his day by shooting his mother and her four dogs. He then burned down her house and went to a nearby town to shoot and kill his grandmother, grandfather, aunt, and uncle as they sat on the porch. In the end, in less than an hour, he killed ten people in three towns across a 24-mile area in southeast Alabama. Media reports say the killer had a "hit-list" of people with whom he was angry. Yet, interviews indicate Mr. McLendon was well-liked and was known as a "reliable team leader" at work. He had no history of mental illness, had not broken up with a girlfriend, and was thought to be a "nice, quiet kid."<sup>1</sup>**

*Well-liked. Reliable team leader. Nice quiet kid. No criminal record.* Such a description is one we would give to a "good person," isn't it? But, if this person *was* a good person, *why did such a good person do such a bad thing?*

---

<sup>1</sup> From the web on 4/9/09 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idUSTRE52A01D20090311> and <http://www.cnn.com/2009/CRIME/03/11/alabama.shooting.spree/>

## Original Sin

While such murderous tirades are beyond what most people experience, or even contemplate, I think it would be a grave mistake—and I do mean *grave*—to pretend that such persons are *categorically* different than the rest of humanity. As offensive as is the Christian doctrine of Original Sin, it knows no favorites.

Related to original sin is a phrase called *total depravity*, which holds while human beings are not all equally *famous* in their sin, all are sinful “through and through.” Picture this: one drop of cyanide poisons an entire cup of clear water.

**Though Terry Sedlacek had no criminal record and lived in an upscale neighborhood, he wrote in his day planner across Sunday March 8 the words “Death Day.” He arrived early at the Maryville First Baptist Church with enough ammunition to kill thirty. In the end, only the pastor was murdered. Friends described Terry as a quiet teen who helped at his family’s restaurant. Police still aren’t sure what the reasoning was. <sup>2</sup> “I want people to know that this is a good community. Things like this don’t happen,” said Mayor Larry Gullledge, who has known Winters for 25 years.<sup>3</sup>**

Quiet teens aren’t supposed to do this kind of thing, and certainly not on Sundays in “good communities” at church. But, as shocking as this *species* of human beings is—

---

<sup>2</sup> From the web on 4-9-09 at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,507884,00.html>

<sup>3</sup> from the web on 4-9-09 at <http://www.chicagobreakingnews.com/2009/03/shooting-church-maryville-st-louis.html>

rampage killers—the *genus* is common to everyone apart from divine intervention. God's story is that mankind has fallen from perfection and is irreparably broken. All the king's horses and men can't put us back together again.

### **Original Betrayal**

We come this evening to commemorate the *last supper*—literally, Jesus' last evening meal—of Jesus on earth before his arrest, trial, and ultimate crucifixion.

In that famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci, one figure stands apart—Judas Iscariot, son of Simon—for good reason: Judas would betray Jesus, a betrayal that would ultimately result in both Jesus' political murder and Judas's suicide.

In every headline murder, the question of motive always comes up. In Judas' case, he was discovered to stealing from the disciples petty cash fund. Stealing from Jesus? That's as bad as stealing from your parents, or from a child.

But, for all of Judas's "creative accounting," until that night he left to betray Jesus, the Bible says that the Devil had not yet entered into Judas. It was "after he had taken the morsel," that Satan entered into him. (**John 13:27**)

Before that point, John tells us there were devilish suggestions "put into" Judas's heart (**John 13:2**, "...when the Devil had already put it into the heart of Judas to betray him"), but these were just *suggestions*; the enemy had not yet moved in.

The suggestions given Judas were the same ones at work in the other disciples, such as the suggestion given to James and John regarding high ranking positions in the soon-to-be elected Messiah's earthly kingdom; or the suggestion given to Peter that Jesus shouldn't really go to Jerusalem and die.

In the latter case, Jesus actually confronted Peter and called him "Satan," which means "enemy" in Greek.

I believe that these devilish suggestions are also the same in the lives of believers today: *disappointment, unbelief, selfishness, pride, and sin.*

Though Judas's *specific* sin led to stealing and conspiring to murder; and though the twisted pride and self-absorption of rage killers resulted in many innocent deaths, we must be honest: the basic problem of these men, and our own, are essentially the same: we all are stuck entertaining ideas centered on *self*, not on *God*.

### **Original Glory**

After Satan possesses him, Judas leaves and Jesus makes this remarkable statement: "Now is the Son of Man Glorified, and God is glorified in Him" (**John 13:31**).

Wait—I thought now is the time of the shame of the Christ, the gory, not the glory of the Son of Man, and the defeat of God, not His victory!

How can Jesus bring glory to God if "NOW" he is going to the *cross*? In this case, it wasn't "Death Sunday," but Death Friday!

But "Death Friday" for Jesus *is* Glory Friday, because in Jesus' death, God will be Just—true to his righteous character and punishing all the injustice in the world, even the smallest ones, by dying on the cross—and God will be Justifer: the reconciler and redeemer, of the one who trusts in Jesus.

We look at human tragedies such as have happened recently in New York and elsewhere, and we are shocked. But our shock separates us from the simple message of the Last Supper: a terrible price must be paid to right the terrible wrongs that had been committed...not only by Judas, other headline criminals in our day...but the terrible wrongs committed by ordinary people against and infinitely holy God.

Measured by ourselves, we come out looking good. We're on the heights of Everest and killers like those we've been hearing about are seven miles below the ocean in the Marianas Trench. But God, when sized up beside both, is beyond the Milky Way, with a goodness so beyond our own that such criminals are next-door neighbors.

### **Conclusion**

With such murder and mayhem in the headlines, some people are indeed asking, "How could good people do such bad things?" But this original question that I posed

should be rephrased to shift the burden of proof, so that we instead ask: "How can such broken people as we all are possibly do anything good?"

Jesus will display the answer to this question in three days; for now, our calling is to admit that apart from God's intervention, the only glory we seek is our own:

Augustine argued that in the Church there are many sheep without and many wolves within. Certainly that was true of the Twelve, and of all of us at one point or another. *We ourselves* are wolves. We ourselves are *satans*—enemies of God.

What is remarkable then is not that we do bad things; it is remarkable that we do any good at all. What is remarkable is that Jesus went to the cross not for decent people (as we imagine ourselves to be) but for wolves, for sinners, for murderers.

Paul writes (**Romans 5:6-8**), "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

We are not righteous. We are not good. We are sinners, traitors, Judases, broken to the core, self-centered, bent beyond repair, and only a radical, bloody, wrathful, unjust death of a God Man could possibly begin to correct our deep alienation from a holy God.

THE END.