

Mark 14:19 *They began to be sorrowful and to say to Him one after another, "Is it I?"*

Here we are, tonight, Good Friday 2020, most of us sitting at home, sheltered, secluded, exiled. We are taking steps to keep ourselves and the people around us safe by remaining isolated in our homes, refraining from more than the most essential social interactions. I don't know about you, but I find it lonely and unsatisfying to watch the world through windows. I want to participate. I want to engage. I want to be present in ways a broadcast camera and a computer screen cannot possibly accomplish. I want to be there!

Tonight we are reminded of a scene, of an event, of a time and place we can only view through the window of history. It is only through the gospel record that we can gaze on a moment, a life, a moment in a life that will change every moment in all of our lives.

On the night before He was betrayed, Jesus sat down to share the Passover dinner with His disciples. As they were reclining and eating, Jesus made an unexpected announcement. He said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." The disciples' response is telling. They do not refute Jesus' assertion. They do not rebuke Him. They do not defend themselves against the accusation. Instead, one by one, they ask Him, "Is it I? Am I the one who will betray you?"

As we look through the gospel window at the occasion of Christ's death on the cross, we cannot help but notice the people gathered around Him in these final hours. These are the doubters. They doubt their allegiance. They doubt their commitment. They doubt the relationship they have with Jesus. They doubt the power of His word and His presence to accomplish in them the works of grace and mercy they have seen Him work in others. They doubt the nature of Who He is and who they are. They each entertain the possibility that after all they have been through together with Jesus they could still betray Him. They still think that His success in the world is more about them and their weakness rather than Jesus and His strength. They ask Jesus, "Is it I?" And the answer is yes, you are the one who will betray me.

The story of Jesus in the last hours of His earthly life is colored by doubters, but there are also deniers. Jesus told them. He told them they would all fall away. Peter, finally, says, "Not me. Even if all the rest of these guys run away, I will still be here." To which Jesus replies, "Three times before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me." Peter, emphatically begins his denial. "Even if I have to die, I will not deny you."

And all the disciples chimed in, denying the truth of what Jesus said. Until He was arrested in the garden, and they all ran away, and Peter, who follows Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, emphatically denies knowing Jesus in order to save his own skin and not be caught up in any overflow anger from the crowd, three times before the rooster crows a second time. Deniers refuse to believe Jesus tells the truth, They refuse to trust Christ, to trust His word, to trust His

heart. They would rather rely on their own intentions than on Christ's heart and purpose. Deniers have no qualms about throwing Jesus under the bus, or nailing Him to the cross, to save their own hides in a moment of fear or weakness. Deniers ask, "Is it I? Am I the one?" and the answer is yes.

Doubters and deniers have no monopoly of presence in Jesus final hours. Denouncers were there. Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane and taken before the Council of the chief priests and elders of the land. These men were looking for justification. They were looking for a valid reason to put Jesus to death. They brought in witness after witness to denounce Jesus but their stories did not match. The leaders could not find a credible reason to call for the death of Jesus. But denouncers don't need a valid reason, they just need the truth in a twisted context.

They asked Jesus, "Are you the Messiah?" Jesus answered truthfully and the denouncers had what they were looking for, not a reason, but an excuse. Not a reason to pursue justice but an excuse to pursue self-promotion. Jesus said, "I am." The denouncers said, "You're dead!" Denouncers, people looking for any excuse they can find to rid their lives of Jesus might ask, "Is it I?" And the answer is yes.

Doubter, deniers, and denouncers are joined that night by debaters. Pilate saw through the charade the priests posed as justice. "He perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered Him up," but, rather than put them in their place, by the authority invested in Him by the Emperor of Rome, he moved for debate. What would you rather have, he asked the crowd. What would you rather I do for you? Come on, negotiate with me. Give me an option.

Debaters deny their own intelligence, their own insight. They look for the next best thing rather than believe that the best they can get is standing right in front of them. They hold out for a better offer. These are the people who think if they live long enough they might get their life right with God, but right now they want to hold out for a better offer. Debaters think they can negotiate with the life of Jesus and the claim He has on their lives. Debaters might ask, "Is it I? Will I betray you?" and the answer will be yes.

The doubters, deniers, denouncers, and debaters have desplicables as companions on that infamous night. While Pilate searches for a crowd pleasing option for releasing Jesus, the chief priests played on the group dynamic of fear and patriotism. They stirred up the crowd to demand a notable murderer rather than a noble Savior. Desplicable. Dishonest. Deceiving. Willing to manipulate the ignorance of others to attain a personal goal. Willing to cause the suffering of the innocent for personal gain. Willing to forego justice to gain greed. The desplicable may ask, "Is it I?" and the answer is most certainly yes.

What a crowd gathers around Jesus. Doubters, deniers, denouncers, debaters, and desplicables are joined by denigraters. We find them in the Roman soldiers who took Jesus and clothed in royal purple, who shoved the crown of thorns upon his head, who spat and slapped and mocked him. They had no cultural reference for understanding who Jesus was and what this commotion about him was all about, but neither did they care to find out. From their position of ignorance they lashed out against someone they did understand. They assumed what they knew was enough and

they attempted to humiliate the One about whom they cared nothing. Denigraters tear down others out of ignorance and self-pride. They probably would not care enough to ask, but if they did ask, "Is it I?" the answer would be yes, it is you.

Deriders were there, at the cross. There were those who passed by and made fun of Jesus, as if their standing on the ground put them in better position before God than Jesus hanging on the cross. "Aha!" they said, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross." Stupid people, deriders. So caught up in their pomposity they miss the fact that Jesus is on the cross to save Himself, but them. The answer for them is also yes. It would be them who would betray Jesus.

Doubters, deniers, denouncers, debaters, despicables, denigraters, deriders, and the disappointed were all there. Women who had followed Jesus from the early days in Galilee, disciples watching from afar off. They were there, watching their hopes suffocate while His blood oozed down the rough wood of a handmade cross, the natural bearing the supernatural unto death. Fearful, anxious, powerless, uncertain, disappointed. They might have been the first to ask, "Is it I?" if the doubters had not already beat them to it. And they too would have to hear the answer: yes, you will betray me.

They were all there: the doubters and deniers; the denouncers and despicables; the denigraters and deriders and disappointed. But look closely through the window of the gospel. Look closely and you will see that these are not alone. You are there. I am there. We too must ask and face the question, "Is it I?" and find that the answer, necessarily, is yes.

Stand at the cross with me and all the others tonight and hear the words of the author of Hebrews, "But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." And hear the words of Paul to the Romans, "For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God."

Is it I? Is it you? Yes! Yes! All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All of us have betrayed his lordship over us. He made us for glory and we have pursued selfishness. He made us for light and we have loved darkness. He made us for love and we have embraced fear. He made us for holiness and we have enacted sinfulness. He made us to be His but we have wanted nothing of Him. He made us to find our joy and satisfaction in Him but we have lusted after what is made and forsaken the Maker. He made us for heaven but we have made our dwelling in the depth of hell.

He is the Son of God, the Beloved, the Creator and Sustainer, the Shepherd, and the Sacrifice and the Healer. He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, he is our Refuge and a very present help in time of trouble. He is our teacher, our guide, the lover of our souls. And we are the doubters, deniers, denouncers, debaters, despicables, denigraters, deriders, and disappointed who betrayed His goodwill and nailed Him to the cross.

Is it I? Yes, it is you. It is you who crucified Him, but it you for whom He died. It is you betrayed Him, and it is you who are embraced by Him. It is you who turned Him away, and it is you He

has brought near through His death on the cross. It is you who embody the sin for which He spilled His blood, and it is you for whom He took your sins in His own body on the cross.

Is it I? Yes. It is me. Is it you? Yes. It is you. We are each of us and all of us there betraying God's mercy and nailing His love, His Son, to the cross, where He died. Betrayed to death, He died. He died. For all of us, for each of us, He died.

Am I the one who put Him there? Am I the doubter, the denier, the denouncer, the debater, the despicable, the denigrater, the derider, the disappointed? I could have been any of them. I might have been all of them. Or I might have been deceived like the crowd or doomed like the robbers. The fact is, my sin and your sin, the sins of the whole world were the reason Jesus the Son of God died on the cross that day. He gave His life an atoning sacrifice for all the doubters, for all the deniers, for all the denouncers, for all of us, for each of us. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Is it I? Is it you? Yes. The answer is yes. And now the question is, you who betrayed Jesus and nailed Him to the cross, "Will you doubters now believe? Will you deniers now trust? Will you denouncers now embrace? Will you debaters now choose? Will you despicable now love? Will you denigraters now praise? Will you deriders now exalt? Will you disappointed now hope?"

It was you for whom Jesus gave His life. Will you now give your life to Him? Will it be you?