# SERMON SERIES: BY HIS WOUNDS

# “Wounded By Betrayal”

## *Isaiah 53:2*

*John 18:1-5*

I invite you to find our two Scripture readings for today―Isaiah 53:2 and John 18:1-5. As you know, today is the first Sunday in Lent, the annual season in the church where we focus on the hardships that Jesus endured as he fulfilled the Father’s will. It’s the season where we step back and take stock of our hearts and lives―and, finding those places where we’ve sinned and fallen short, we confess and repent―and renew our relationship with God.

Our sermon series for Lent is titled “By His Wounds.” Each week we’re going to explore a type of woundedness that Jesus experienced, and which you and I experience as well. We actually began the series this past week on Ash Wednesday by looking at how we’ve wounded God by abandoning him for lesser things.

Each week in this series we’re going to use two Scripture readings. The first will come from Isaiah 53, a prophecy called “The Suffering Servant” chapter because of how it describes a lowly, overlooked, ridiculed deliverer—not the great conquering warrior-king like David that the people expected.

*2My servant grew up in the Lord’s presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him.* ***Isaiah tells us that the One whom God chose to save his people didn’t arrive with the blustering ego of a Donald Trump nor the stunning attractiveness of a Jason Momoa. He wasn’t the richest, like Jeff Bezos of Amazon, or of high standing like Prince William, Duke of Cambridge. Instead, he’s ordinary; less than ordinary, even. We could see him in a crowd and not notice him at all.***

Deliverers are dominating, forceful, attractive people, who by their personal magnetism draw people to themselves and their causes. They convince others to do what they want them to do. People who refuse to follow that leadership frequently find themselves crushed and tossed aside. Yet Isaiah’s Suffering Servant doesn’t fit that picture at all.

Herein is part of the mystery of the incarnation that we prepare for during Advent and celebrate at Christmas. Would a baby born in the back stable of a village inn really shake the Roman Empire and the world? Would a rabbi arriving in Jerusalem for the Passover on the back of a donkey really be heralded as the Savior of the world? It’s crazy; it’s nuts! And yet that’s how God chose to offer salvation to all who would accept him—to reconcile all things on earth to himself—sneaking in under cover of darkness, doing the least expected and most unbelievable things.

And as we know, there were many who couldn’t wrap their heads around who Jesus was or what he was doing. Many Israelites thought that God should do the sort of things he’d done in the past—like parting the Red Sea or raising up King David or blessing Israel and cursing everyone else.

For some, Jesus didn’t perform the sort of actions one associated with deliverance. Instead of rallying an army to overthrow Rome, he told people to pay their taxes. Rather than condemning the oppression of his people by a foreign invader, Jesus healed a Roman soldier’s servant. Instead of talking sedition and planning sneak attacks, Jesus taught to turn the other cheek.

And for a few more radical people, Jesus didn’t lead the charge to restore Israel. He didn’t have a sword and wasn’t interested in civil disobedience. Some, like Judas Iscariot, thought they could force his hand. Maybe if a group of men converged on Jesus in a shadowy garden grove, threatening to arrest him, he’d get off his high horse and start kicking some butt. Let’s look at our second Scripture reading, John 18:1-5.

*After saying these things, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees. 2Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with his disciples. 3The leading priests and Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove.*

*4Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. “Who are you looking for?” he asked.*

*5“Jesus the Nazarene,” they replied.*

*“I am he,” Jesus said. (Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.)*

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus experienced his deepest, most painful betrayal. One of the twelve men he’d picked to be his closest disciples—Judas Iscariot—had given Jesus up for thirty pieces of silver. ***That was the going rate for a slave at the time. Judas betrayed Jesus for the cost of crop harvester or cleaning lady.***

Most scholars believe Judas did that because he wanted to force Jesus into action. Judas wasn’t content with the ‘kingdom of God’ talk without some strength to make it real. Judas wanted to be part of a revolutionary movement that would run the Romans out of town. He wanted the warrior-king like David who’d crush Israel’s enemies and restore her national glory. Instead, Judas got a suffering servant. So he betrayed Jesus.

***The dictionary defines betrayal as ‘delivering or exposing to an enemy by treachery or disloyalty;’ ‘to be unfaithful in guarding, maintaining or fulfilling;’ ‘to disappoint the hopes and expectations of.’*** Jesus experienced all of those at the hands of Judas. His loyalty and love had been cast aside. He’d been singled out to those who wanted to kill him. One to whom he’d entrusted God’s mission had disappointed him.

Betrayal is one of those things in life that, when it happens to us, we’re left in shock. It feels like the world has been pulled out from under us. We aren’t sure who to trust. We try to understand why the betrayal happened.

***In my previous appointment we had a few members who’d been allowed too much control in the church for a number of years. One way they exercised that control was to disrupt the choir in the traditional service by quitting from time to time. When things didn’t go their way, they’d stop being in the choir―the idea being that if the worship service was disrupted enough by not being able to have a choir, the pastor or music leader or committee or whoever was the target of their animosity would have to surrender and give in to what they wanted.***

***After I’d been there a while, they pulled this stunt in retaliation for some proposed changes the majority of our leadership supported. I wasn’t intimidated by their tactics, knowing full well what they were up to. So I emailed my key church leaders, not only to inform them of the situation, but to remind that that we needed to stand firm and have each other’s backs. If those persons wanted to harm the traditional worship service by not having a choir, we’d just move forward without a choir. I wasn’t about to beg those disruptive personalities to come back. I’d been training my leaders about staying strong during times of transition, and told them in the email not to be worried or upset by this stunt. It was all just a test to see if I would cave in to their power and influence.***

***What happened next set in motion a chain of events that were the hardest I’ve ever had to face: one of my key leaders, who’d been involved in our leadership training and had publicly been behind our transition initiatives, leaked the email to the troublemakers. I’d been betrayed by someone close to me.***

***And sure enough, I was left in shock. It felt like the world had been pulled out from under me. I wasn’t sure who to trust. I tried to understand why the betrayal had happened.***

Did Jesus do those same things that night in Gethsemane? John 18:4 tells us *Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him.* Surely, the divine nature of Jesus knew all things since he was the Father in the flesh. But what about his human nature? Did he feel the crushing weight of betrayal? Did he wonder why Judas was doing it? Did he wonder how he could’ve misjudged Judas so badly?

We don’t know. But if anyone understands what betrayal feels like, it’s Jesus. Betrayal is a difficult, agonizing thing to endure because trust has been shattered. And Jesus knows that feeling. He understands because he’s already been through it. And because of that, he can comfort us in our times of brokenness. He’s there beside us when our betrayer is revealed, and we wonder how we could’ve been so blind. Jesus experienced and endured betrayal so that through his woundedness he could offer us the help and healing we need.

I don’t know if you’ve ever been betrayed. If you haven’t, thank God that you’ve not had to go through it. But if you have, know this: Jesus *does* understand. He can comfort you. By his wounds the pain of that betrayal *can* be healed.

Betrayal often terminates a relationship. It’s hard to stay close to someone who’s sold us out. And sometimes the best thing we can do is put some distance between us and our betrayer, and get on with our life. But we must be able to forgive him or her for the betrayal. We cannot let the betrayal sit in our heart and poison us from the inside out.

***I had to forgive the person who betrayed me. The relationship was irreparably damaged, and I never went to the person to confront them on the betrayal. For the remainder of my time in that appointment, I couldn’t trust that person. But I did try my best to forgive the person and the deception. I had to. If not, that person and that treachery would’ve kept me in its power. I’d have been a slave to it.***

It’s often been speculated what might’ve happened if Judas had asked Jesus for forgiveness. Matthew 27:3-5 tells us *3Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, 4saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” 5And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.*  If, instead of committing suicide, Judas had gone to Jesus and repented, I wonder how history could’ve been different? I have no doubt that Jesus would’ve forgiven Judas. But Judas hadn’t learned his lessons from Jesus. He obviously hadn’t been paying attention to what Jesus had been teaching and modeling. So he opted to end his life rather than seek forgiveness and restoration.

If you still struggle with a betrayal, don’t be like Judas. Don’t let someone else’s sinful deception ruin your life. Turn to Jesus, who understands the depths of pain and confusion that betrayal brings. Forgive your betrayer. Surrender the betrayal over to Christ; let him take it and work it into something beautiful and good, because that’s what he does. Because of his woundedness, Jesus can take something like betrayal and use it for redemptive purposes.

Let us pray:

*Father God, one of the things we often fail to do in our times of woundedness is to praise you for the hurt. It’s counterintuitive to us to give thanks for something that has caused us so much pain. But when we can praise you in all things—the good and the bad―we loosen fear’s hold on us. We rob Satan of his power to make us scared about what happened to us. This is why the apostle Paul could say with such confidence,* Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand (Philippians 4:6-7). *We would have that peace, Father; peace that would heal the pain of betrayal that we’ve known.*

*So first, thank you for the betrayal of Jesus, and the suffering he endured as a result of it. For through the actions of Judas, you made salvation available to us. And we thank you for those betrayals that have happened to us. Praise you for such actions because they force us deeper into you. Take the betrayals we may have experienced and redeem them for good, Father. As Jesus let his suffering become part of our salvation, so too may our trials and struggles be used to testify to your power and glory.*

*All this we pray with grateful and humble hearts, confident in the One who hears them; and to Jesus Christ may all honor and glory and praise be given. Amen.*