

March 1, 2015

THE ARREST AND DESERTION

Matthew 26:47-56

Some stories have several points of climax. The Palm Sunday Procession was the first one. I believe The Arrest is the second. Jesus had been speaking to Peter, James, and John. *"The hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up. Let us be going. Behold, My betrayer is at hand."* (26:45b-46) Jesus could see the face of Judas in the torchlight.

And, *"While He was speaking, Judas...arrived!"* (47a) We know where he's been by knowing who's with him: *"A large crowd with swords and clubs...from the Chief Priests and the Elders of the people."* There was no doubt about what was going on, and there was no doubt about who was betraying Jesus. Judas had even told them that he would embrace with affection the One they were to arrest. (48) Why Judas did what he did is not really known. Nor are the details able to give us enough clues. We can only speculate.

So...this is only speculation. The name *Isca*riot – Judas is the only disciple with a last name – may give a clue. It *could* simply mean *From Kerioth*, a town in Israel. But it could also mean a *sicarii*. A *sicarius* was a short, sharp blade with a solid, firm handle. It was used, sometimes, by radical zealots. They could blend into a crowd of people, sneak up to a Roman soldier, stab him quickly, and be long gone from the spot before the dead man hit the ground. Such radical zealots, *sicarii* – *sicarius*-wielders – were eager for the time of revolt to come. A zealot was someone who was zealous for the Kingdom of Israel, especially, for their land to be rid of their pagan occupiers. They claimed a fervent patriotism, but not a serious faith. They simply hated the Romans. A *sicarii* was willing to act now...with rabid vengeance. Some scholars have speculated that Barabbas was perhaps in league with such an attitude, if not a leader. He was in prison at the time for having been involved in an insurrection that had taken place in Jerusalem probably only a few days ago. He must have killed a Roman soldier because he was described as a murderer, and was probably slated for crucifixion on Friday.

At the time of Christ, there was a belief that the Messiah would be, like David, a great warrior-king, who would lead the Jews to a golden time that would surpass the reigns of David and Solomon. Perhaps Judas held to this ideology. Another ideology among Jews of the time was that of the Pharisees: If the Chosen People stuck to the letter of the Law, God would simply elevate Israel to its former glory, the Romans would leave without a battle, or, become Jews, and peace would come. A third perspective was the more common one: It didn't matter who controlled the land, just be a faithful Jew. Living by the Law was part of this, but faith and belief were what really mattered. Still, no one really liked the Romans, and would like them to leave.

Jesus walked this middle ground...though there are occasional clues that He leaned in the direction of direct revolt. Judas may have taken his cues from such comments from Christ as: *"The Son of Man is to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay*

everyone for what they have done. Truly, I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His glory!" (Matthew 16:27-28)

Perhaps when Judas heard this he felt as though he would be among those who would not taste death...until after the Son of Man had come. Perhaps Judas' motive in betraying Christ was to initiate the holy battle; to get Jesus to act as the great warrior-king Judas thought He must be; to force Jesus to show His hand instead of waiting patiently for everyone to believe. Judas may have thought of Jesus as the Messiah, but not as a Savior; as King more than a Healer; a leader of warriors rather than a leader of faith. Judas thought that the kingdom of Israel was more important than the Kingdom of God!

Judas walked right up to Jesus and said, "*Greetings, Rabbi!*" And he kissed Him. (26:49) Perhaps he thought that this would be the moment Jesus would turn into a super-warrior. But ... all Jesus did was surrender: "*Friend, do what you are here to do.*" (50a) I think Judas would be haunted for the rest of his life by the voice of Jesus speaking the word *Friend*. Only in Luke is it written that Jesus told His betrayer, "*Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*" (Luke 22:48)

However it all happened, Jesus was arrested. A very brief scuffle ensued, but Jesus put an immediate stop to it, saying, "*All who take up the sword will die by the sword.*" (26:52) The implication is that *you reap what you sow*. Bloodshed only leads to more bloodshed. But then Jesus says something rather wonderful and curious at the same time. It is wonderful when you think of how glorious it would be, and, it is curious in that it was not done: "*Don't you know that I can appeal to My Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?*" (v. 53)

That would be awesome! Wow! But what would faith in Christ be if that had happened? Would we really have faith? Or would we be the same as the zealots – great expectations but minimal faith. Maybe that's about where Christian culture is these days. Our expectations of ourselves have little to do with spiritual growth and encouraging others to grow, but a lot to do with what Jesus can and has done for us as individuals....and what He will do for us in the sweet bye and bye.

But Jesus explains that what is happening is fulfilling the Scriptures. (v. 54 and 56a) More on that later. At this moment, as the climax unfolds, Jesus takes a final jab at the Chief Priests and Elders: "*Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I was a bandit? ...*" They only did this under a blanket of darkness because "*they feared the crowds, because they regarded Jesus as a prophet.*" (Matthew 21:46) They could have arrested Jesus anytime. "*...Day after day, I sat in the Temple teaching, and you did not arrest Me!*"

How deceitful you are, Chief Priests and Elders! They would never do anything that would expose themselves as hypocrites, or, that would cause them to lose favor before the people. They had no favor with the people, but...they had their power. Jesus' comment reveals their character to them as so blatantly against Jesus that, later, no one would have any respect

for them. They only held their status before the people because they were puppets of Rome, and Rome backed them up.

Again, Jesus tells those who could hear Him that "*All this has taken place so that the Scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.*" (56a) Surrender....surrender....surrender. Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled.

Now Jesus is more alone than ever. No one could go through it with Him, and, no one should go through life without Him.