

## I

When I was growing up, I got into my fair share of scrapes and disagreements with my peers. I know you find this hard to believe, but not everyone in my school thought I was charming and adorable. It was nothing serious, mind you, just the typical stuff of adolescent boyhood.

But when I was in middle school, a friend who I thought was one of my best friends, a friend who I thought I could count on to have my back no matter what, betrayed me and embarrassed me.

And that betrayal of my trust from someone whom I thought was in my inner circle hurt worse than any of the roughest scrapes and tumbles I ever had with anybody else.

## II

One of the hardest things about being a human, is the pain that comes when someone whom you trusted, someone whom you thought was in your inner circle, someone whom you thought you could depend on, betrays your trust.

And unfortunately, I think that for most of us, that's a universal human experience. We all have our disagreements with others outside our circle, outside our tribe. That's just how life is. But the most pain, the most agony, the most sorrow, comes when we feel betrayed and attacked from someone we thought was on the inside.

And that brings us to our story for today.

## III

This spring and summer, we are reading and preaching our way through the

Acts of the Apostles, or Acts for short, which, as you may remember, is really part 2 of the Gospel of Luke. In Luke's gospel, we read about the calling of the first twelve disciples. Jesus always had more followers than just these twelve, of course, but these twelve formed Jesus' inner circle. These were the men that Jesus confided in, that accompanied him, that were there in the upper room on that last night when Jesus talked to them about his impending death and resurrection, and then he took bread, gave thanks for it, broke it, and gave it to them. These twelve were on the inside.

For three years, they had been in their share of scrapes and tight spots together. They had their share of run-ins with people on the outside. Not everyone was receptive to the good news about Jesus Christ. But it was a betrayal from the inside that led directly to Jesus hanging in agony on the cross. It was one of their own – Judas, who led the temple police to Jesus in the garden and betrayed him with a kiss.

And so when we come to our story today, the disciples are facing what some commentators have describes as the first crisis of faith in the early church – how to go about recovering from such a devastating breach of trust.

So I invite you now to listen for a Word from God from Acts 1:15-26.

*In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, "Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus— for he was numbered among us and*

*was allotted his share in this ministry.” (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) “For it is written in the book of Psalms,*

*‘Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’;*

*and ‘Let another take his position of overseer.’*

*So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

The entirety of Christians in the world in those days could have easily fit in this room – just 120 people. The resurrected Jesus had just ascended into heaven, but they were still waiting on the promise of power through the Holy Spirit. And they had just suffered through the trauma of a major betrayal. And the one who had betrayed them – someone whom they’d loved and

trusted for years had just died in a horrific way. It’s not too much of a stretch to say that the church was facing its very first crisis of faith.

So what to do? It’s worth noting that they never considered just leaving Judas’ position among the apostles unfilled. They didn’t say, “Well, 11 is just as good as 12, let’s just carry on.”

For starters, Jesus had appointed 12 apostles, not 11, so they knew they needed to fill that spot. And as women and men who had been raised reading the Hebrew Scriptures, they understood the significance of the number 12, remembering the 12 sons of their ancestor Jacob, and the importance of the 12 tribes of ancient Israel.

So they knew they had sticking with 11 wouldn’t do. They knew they had to find someone to take up Judas’ share of the ministry of apostleship.

But notice that they didn’t just grab the nearest warm body and plug him in. First, they developed some qualifications. In their minds, whoever took this spot needed to be someone who wasn’t brand new to the movement. They needed to find someone whom they’d known since the beginning, someone who held integrity.

And so after developing that list of qualifications, they were left with two names.

And then comes the part of this passage that kept grabbing my attention.

Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart.”

You know everyone’s heart.

I submit to you that this wasn’t just a simple prayer lifting up to God their personal

preferences after receiving the report of the nominating committee.

You know everyone's heart.

You know the pain in our hearts from this incredible breach of trust. You know our distress. You know how vulnerable we are at this moment. You know how easy it would be for us to fall into cynicism, for our hearts to be hardened, for us to just quit and give up now. You know how easy it would be for us to put the baggage we're carrying from our disappointment with Judas on top of whoever you've got in mind to lead us next.

"Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us. Show us what you have in mind for us."

#### IV

My friend, maybe you've recently suffered a betrayal of some kind. Maybe someone whom you trusted, someone whom you thought you could depend on no matter what – has disappointed you and hurt you and left you shaken and wounded.

Maybe you find yourself living through a faith crisis of sorts, living in an in-between time, wondering what will happen next. Maybe you've got a broken heart.

My friend, I invite you to remember the example of your great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers in the faith. When they were facing a crisis of faith, they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart."

Here's one of the things that's most compelling to me about the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel says that in Christ, God became fully human. That means that God knows firsthand what it is to be like you.

God knows firsthand what it is to be human. God knows what it is to be tired, to be frightened, to be confused. God knows firsthand what it is to love someone so much that it hurts, and God knows firsthand what it is to have that love betrayed.

One of my favorite Psalms says that God knows a word before it is on our tongues. The Psalmist says that God knows us better than we know ourselves.

So my friend, if you are heartbroken this morning, God knows. God knows your heart, and God knows what that is like.

And the good news of the gospel is that God is in the business of making a way forward where it seems like there is no possible way.

When your ancestors Abraham and Sarah were getting on in years and wondering if God's promise to make of them a great nation would die with them in their old age, God made a way forward where there was no possible way.

When your ancestors were trapped between Pharaoh's charging chariots on one side and the Red Sea on the other, God made a way forward where there was no possible way.

When your Savior Jesus Christ was crucified, dead, and buried, sealed in the tomb, when death had had its way with him, God made a way forward where there was no possible way.

This I have come to believe in my heart of hearts. God is in the business of making a way when there is no way. From Genesis to Revelation and back again, over and over, when people are stuck, when

people are hurting, when people are frightened, God makes a way forward.

Lord, you know everyone's heart, they prayed. God knows you, my friend. God knows your heart. God knows you better than even you know yourself. And if you will open yourself to God, if you will lay your heart open before God in prayer, God will make a way for you, too.

V

And God will make a way for us. These are difficult days to be a community of faith. There are so many things coming at us all at once. The end stages of this terrible pandemic. The continued fallout of the most contentious election season in our lifetimes. Our ongoing struggle to come to terms with racism and its impact upon our past, present, and future. And the list goes on. There are so many critical issues facing our community about which we are not of one mind, and there is so much conflicting information out there.

In his book *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't*, author Simon Sinek says that human beings are hard-wired to work together in teams to solve problems. He observes that among the other living creatures with whom we human beings share this planet, we aren't the biggest or strongest or fastest of the animals. We did not come to rule the earth with brute strength, speed, or ferocity. We came to rule the earth by forming groups, communicating, and working together to solve problems.

And Sinek observes that when we pull together, when we circle the wagons, so to speak, when we trust that the team has everyone's best interests at heart, the team

can fend off attacks from outside the circle and overcome seemingly impossible odds.

When teams fail, Sinek says, it's usually not because the team was overwhelmed by forces from the outside – it's because the team suffered an attack from within. When the team spends more time worried about attacks from within, they can't possibly focus and fend off all the attacks from without.

This is a time for us to be the church. This is a time to remember that Christ teaches that those who would become the greatest of all must be willing to become the least of all and the servant of all. This is a time for us to outdo one another in showing honor. To bear with one another, to forgive one another, to cultivate the fruits of the spirit: patience and gentleness and humility and self-control.

We are all tired. We have all been through recent trauma, some of us more severe than others. We are all worried about what comes next. So this is a time for us to remember that God knows everyone's heart. God knows us better than we know ourselves. And if we will open our hearts to God in prayer, God will show us the way forward.

Thanks be to God. Amen.