

Sermon- Calling out the Devil

Scripture: John 6:70-71

Sunday, April 29, 2018

We have come to the very end of the 6th chapter of John and this is going to be my 6th sermon on John 6. Funny how the numbers align. Anyway it is in this chapter that we see opposition to Jesus develop beyond the pharisees. Last Sunday I preached about how the people went from wanted Jesus to be their king to being offended by his message that they had to eat his flesh and drink his blood to have eternal life. Most people said, looks like this man is not who we thought he was and walk away. But among the 12 it seems that Jesus still had solid support. When Jesus asked them if they too would like to leave him, Peter stands up and speaking on behalf of the 12 says, “we believe and we know that you are the Holy from of God and your words are the source of eternal life. Where would we go Jesus?” That was a great declaration of faith. And it did represent the views of the group. But there was one person who pretended to go along but what he had kept secret from everyone was that he did not believe. He had managed to deceive everyone. Except Jesus. And Jesus calls out his deception with some very strong words. He says, “I chose the twelve of you but one of you is a devil.” In the next verse the narrator names who Jesus was referring to. It was Judas Iscariot. This is such a bomb shell of a statement that I am going to just focus on these two versus today.

Let’s address the context details first and then we will look at the concept details. Now we all know that the one who betrayed Jesus was Judas Iscariot. In ancient Jewish culture, a person was defined by the father’s line and so it is important to note that we are talking about Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. This is important because at the time, there were two people by the name of Judas among the 12. The other Judas has so many other names that most people don’t realize that there were two Judas’. In Luke

6:16 and Acts 1:13 this second Judas is called Judas the brother of James. He was also referred to as Judas the Zealot in a 2nd century work. But in Mark 3:18 this second Judas is called Thaddeus. In Matthew 10:3 he is called Lebbeus. So while it was common in that culture to have multiple names, in this particular case you can imagine why the other Judas would have wanted to be known by any other name besides Judas! But in the process of distinguishing the two we get an interesting detail. You see, the “problem Judas”, we are told in verse 71 is son of Simon Iscariot. And people who study this kind of thing tell us that Iscariot is actually a hyphenated “Ish-Kerioth”. Ish in Hebrew means “man” and Kerioth is the name of a town in Judah. So Iscariot literally means “man from Kerioth” which we know is a town in Judah. Now I do not want to make too much of this, except to point out that it means the “problem Judas” was from Judah. Which is very interesting because all the other 11 disciples were from Galilee. Do you know who else was from the tribe of Judah? Jesus himself. So it would have felt like a double betrayal for Jesus to be betrayed not only by one in his inner circle, but also by the only one among the 12 from his own tribe.

Now all this discussion of the betrayer of course comes from the author’s editorial comments in verse 71. But when Jesus signals his awareness of evil within the 12 he does not openly identify who he is talking about. And in that respect, his statement that “one of you is a devil”, could have potentially offended any or all of them. And this was not the only time Jesus signaled the presence of evil among the 12. Remember just after Jesus predicts his death in Matt 16, and Peter takes Jesus aside and says, “this will never happen to you”, and Jesus rebukes him and says “get behind me Satan”? Jesus is always alert to the presence of evil around him and is very quick to point it out wherever he sees it. And so when he sees that after Peter speaks for all the 12 saying they are still with Jesus and Jesus knows that it is not true for all the 12, he is quick to point out that even though he chose the 12, that one of them was a devil.

But because this statement is so shocking, I want to turn to the effect Jesus' statement would have had on the 12. What do you think his disciples would have felt hearing Jesus say something so hard hitting? If you are guessing some of them would have been quite offended, you are probably right. But here is the thing. It was not Jesus' intent to offend. Offense was never the intent, whether Jesus was speaking to large crowds or his inner circle, whether he was speaking to temple priests or a leper on the street. We know that for sure because Jesus has declared in John 3:16 that his purpose of coming to the earth was not to condemn people but to save humanity. And in Matt 11:6 he says, "blessed are those who do not take offense because of me". Clearly offense is not his intent. So if he was not intending to offend, what was his intention? Well what Jesus was doing was throwing light where there is spiritual darkness and opening up an opportunity for his listeners to look within themselves and see if there is evil there that Jesus is talking about. Jesus by saying, look there is a devil among you was giving his listeners an opportunity to examine themselves honestly to see which of their thoughts were aligned with God's word and which of thoughts were aligned more with their own selfish purposes or even the devils purposes. This analysis is easy when you are in the presence of the pure light coming off Jesus, right? See there can be no deception with you are in God's presence. The effect of Jesus diagnosis of the presence of evil among them was for all the 12 to look deeply in themselves. But here is my guess about what happened among the 12. Among the 12, 11 of them would have said to themselves, "yes I do entertain evil thoughts in me every now and then and I need to make sure I don't give them much oxygen especially when I am near Jesus". But in the case of one gentlemen, our "problematic Judas", I can bet you, he was thinking "well the only evil I have done is tolerating these fools for 3 years". But you see in that process, as a response to the pure truth of Jesus' words no matter how hard you try, the intentions of your heart get exposed.

OK, so Jesus signals the presence of evil and somehow Judas' evil bubbles up, secretly at first but then eventually for the whole world to see. But I want to switch gears here for a bit to deal with a question you might be thinking. You see Jesus knew that Judas would sin and in the end he would go to hell. And Jesus knew this not suddenly in John chapter 6 verse 70 but he knew it all the way back in John 1 verse 1, which is the very first moment of creation. So why did he do it? Why did God even create a being who would end up in eternal condemnation. Why not just create all these people who would eventually be saved so that there would be nobody in hell? Well, again, this is one of those things you will have to ask God when you met him. But I can share some angles to dealing with these questions that are revealed to us in scripture. One is that it was very important for God to create beings with the power to chose between good and evil. And when his created beings chose evil, they still serve God's purpose. Like when Judas betrays Jesus, it caused Jesus to die on the cross and that results in salvation for many. Also those who are saved need to be refined in a fire. And the evil in this world provides a lot of the fire. Although mind you, that is no justification for evil. God can use all kinds of other situations to refine people. He could use an earthquake or a tornado just as effectively to refine us as any made evil. So evil is in some way used to serve God's purpose. But the Bible is very clear, that God does not cause evil, he does not cause anyone to sin neither does he even tempt. All that is something that God's enemy does. So God is also not making a person chose evil to suit his purpose. But once evil choices are made, God just knows how to turn even those to his advantage. Jesus did not need Judas to betray him. Judas made a negative choice he was perfectly free to not make. Just because God knows what choices people will make in the end, it does not mean that those people could not have made any other choices in their lifetime.

Further, even when Jesus uses extremely hard hitting language, there is grace in his words even towards Judas that is easy to miss. Let me point that to you. You see even though a "betrayer" was necessary in the whole saga of Christ's crucifixion, it did not

have to be Judas. Judas had a choice like everybody else and any one of the 12 could have potentially done what Judas did. By offering up the diagnosis, that “a devil is present” he was giving whoever was contemplating evil a way to recognize it and the option to choose a different path. It would not have made any difference to Jesus’ end goal because from Jesus perspective given human sin nature, if person A was not the betrayer it would have been person B. And betraying Jesus would have not been the ultimate unforgivable sin either. It was possible that Judas could have repented and been saved even after he did what he did. But Jesus is always full of compassion for the lost. And it is this compassion that causes Jesus to engage with Judas till the very end. Have you thought about the fact that Judas would have been one of the people whose feet Jesus washed? So if you feel that Jesus was unduly harsh when he tells his 12 that there is a devil among you, Jesus was only naming the problem to help them recognize evil. Something like when you go to a doctor and the doctor has test results in his hand and he knows exactly what disease you have. In some countries the doctors don’t bother to tell the patients what they have for fear that it would upset the patients too much. The doctor has to care enough for the patient to bring a painful and difficult diagnosis to them. And many doctors don’t care enough for their patients in some countries to tell them the truth. But Jesus is not like that. He had the grace to explain the problem. And it was up to the 12 to decide how to receive Jesus’ graceful diagnosis. If they received it as intended, they would be on the path to salvation. If not, they will be choosing their own eternal condemnation. Even when Jesus is super harsh, He is actually exuding grace!

So when you look at this remarkable interaction between Jesus and his disciples, what does it mean for us as a church? I think this interaction really helps is to understand how to move forward as a community of disciples. Because it is telling us that firstly, we should not be scared of presenting the truth in love to each other. Of course we have to present truth in love because without love, our intentions will not be in the right place.

When things are done in love, the end goal is always to repair, to restore, to heal and to build up. As long as the intent is positive, truth can always be presented no matter how difficult it sounds. But when we bring truth to the table we have to also bring it with a great sense of humility and prayer. Because we may be servants of Jesus, but we are not Jesus. And we could be wrong. As we pray and discern God's will and test our intentions and examine our love, then after all that work we can now present the truth. Once truth is presented, it should be received also with the right attitude. In Matt 11:6 Jesus says this, "And blessed is [he], whosoever shall not be offended in me". Know this, if it is truly coming from God, it is not intended to offend but to give us an opportunity to diagnose and heal and grow.

So as we move together to the next chapter our church, as we discern God's will and make difficult discussions, let us become more Christlike in are speaking the truth in love. We cannot move forward unless we name the evil that is holding us back. But even as we call out the evil among us, let the naming be done with love and the best of intentions and may the truth be received and discerned in the right spirit as well so that we can all grow together to become a more accurate representation of the kingdom of God here on earth. Let us pray.