

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

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Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

[0 : 00] Before we jump into God's Word, why don't we pray? Lord, we ask your blessing on the reading and the proclaiming of your Word, this 55th Psalm.

And Lord, we pray that we would be people that do not just hear your Word, but people that hear your Word and meditate upon it and apply it to our lives and live by it.

And Lord, we recognize that it's a very hard thing. Actually, apart from you, it's impossible. So we ask for your help. By your Spirit, we ask that you would make these words true in our hearts and that we would grip them and cling to you.

For they are your very words. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. If you have a Bible, follow along with me, Psalm 55. If you don't have a Bible, there should be a stack of Bibles at the back.

If not, then follow along with a friend. That soul up there, which has the greatest pain, the Master said, is Judas Iscariot.

[1 : 06] With head inside, he plies his legs without. Of the two others, who head downward are, the one who hangs from the black jowl is Brutus.

See how he writhes himself and speaks no word. And the other, who so stalwart seems, is Cassius. If we have any classicists here, or you remember high school, that is from Dante's *Inferno*, the 34th Canto, where Dante, who is taken on a tour of hell by Virgil, he sees Satan himself with his three heads.

And in each head is Judas in one, Marcus, Junius, Brutus in the other, and Gaius, Cassius in the other mouth.

Judas Iscariot is very familiar to us. He is the one who betrayed Jesus. The other two are the chief betrayers of Julius Caesar. And these three, I guess, in one sense, are the most famous betrayers of all time.

Written in the 1200s, Dante has them in the very mouth of the chief betrayer of all, Satan. They swore fealty and love towards their masters and then stabbed them in the back.

[2 : 30] There's indeed something terribly horrific about betrayal, isn't there? Dante seemed to have found that the case. And that story, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, still resonates 800 plus years later.

There seems to be truth that betrayal is the most egregious. For with betrayal comes the breakdown of trust and the erosion of relationships and societal cohesion, without which trust, without trust, our society ceases to be.

It starts to erode and crumble and break down. Psalm 55 is a psalm of David that laments the betrayal of a close friend.

And here David doesn't specify who that close friend is. I mean, in the narrative, in 2 Samuel, two key people betray King David.

His son Absalom and his advisor Ahithophel. Both are close to him, obviously his son.

[3 : 42] Both betray him. Nothing is specified here. But David was betrayed. We're going to read in this psalm, in a sense, normally the psalms follow a nice, for the most part, organized structure.

In Psalm 55, it's a hodgepodge of pleas and angst and anger and cries for help. And then pleas and appeals to God and then cries for help.

This is a psalm of somebody in anguish. What's interesting about David as well is that he was a betrayer as much as these other two were.

If you remember the story of Bathsheba, where David should have been off to war, should have been doing what kings do, he sees a woman who is not his wife and he has an affair with her.

Turns out it's his close friend's wife. And to cover up his sin and his evil and his affair, he has his friend killed. David, the betrayer, is being betrayed.

[4 : 50] So this psalm, it's a very helpful psalm for us because if we're honest, we can find ourselves on either side of a relationship, of either being betrayed or being the one to betray.

It helps us to be honest and not a proud person as if betrayal is something that is only possible for these people or that group and not for ourselves.

More than that though, this psalm helps us to have a heart that is ready to understand and receive Jesus because Jesus was betrayed by the people that he created and he was sent to save and by his own disciple for 40 pieces of silver, Judas Iscariot.

So this psalm, in a very real way, is an honest look at what betrayal does and it's a psalm that helps our hearts prepare for Christ.

So we'll break the text into three parts and it's kind of a hard way to break up this text for the very reason I mentioned at the beginning that this is a text of somebody who is in anguish and pain where he's a bit all over the place.

[6 : 17] But we're going to look at the text in three different ways and we'll be all over the text this morning. The first is the reality of betrayal. And the second is the response to betrayal.

And then the third point we're going to look at is the hope for the betrayed. So the reality of betrayal, the response to betrayal, the hope for the betrayed. If you could follow along, that would be helpful. Look with me, verses 3 and then verses 12 to 14. Because of the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked, for they drop trouble upon me and in anger they bear a grudge against me.

Drop down to verse 12. For it is not an enemy who taunts me, then I could bear it. It is not an adversary who deals insolently with me, then I could hide from him.

But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my friend, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together within God's house.

[7 : 20] We walked in the throng. Notice here that the betrayers, although are clearly now enemies, used to be friends, companions, equals.

They were familiar with one another. They worshipped together and made covenants, agreements, that would undoubtedly invoke the name of God.

There was a deep connection with these people and King David. In short, this was a dear friend. David does not specify, like I mentioned at the beginning, who this was, nor the specific thing that was done.

I mean, it could be his son, it could be his advisor, we're not too sure. And there's a level of ambiguity here that's helpful for us because it allows us to apply this text in a very personal way in our lives.

So as I see it, betrayal can take at least three different forms, at least three different forms within this text. And we see it, the first way, the first form it can take is a peer or friend relationship.

[8 : 32] There's a betrayal. At least it's described here as this relationship of two peers, two friends, two equals. The second, the text doesn't really talk about it, but I think it's appropriate to talk about betrayal in terms of a relationship with somebody in authority.

And then the third and final one we'll look at is how betrayal can affect marriage. Imagine that, you confide in a friend, a family member, a colleague, you pour out your heart.

It's very tough if you are a closed-off person, an introvert, to be vulnerable. I mean, even for the most outgoing of us, vulnerability, maybe it doesn't come supernaturally.

It's not a thing that we just pour our guts out to anyone about anything. But imagine you confide in a friend, a family member, a colleague, only to have that piece of information that was offered in that moment of vulnerability treated as if it was social currency for somebody to use for gossip.

a piece of juicy gossip rather than a precious offering of trust.

[9 : 59] Your trust in that individual person will likely be severed, but what will likely happen is that to a degree your trust in all people will be weakened.

Same goes for situations where somebody is in a position of authority only to abuse that office or relationship. It's not just that one doesn't trust that authority figure, but struggles with any authority figure that reminds them of the abuse.

You see, when betrayal happens, when trust breaks down, things really start to unravel and it's hard to climb up out of that pit, that hole, that problem, that experience.

It's hard to rebound. The final example is of a spouse. This is where the pain can often run the deepest. When trust is broken due to emotional or physical infidelity, the betrayal feels as if a very

part of that person is torn off, ripped apart, severed.

And how on earth can you sew that back up? Your arm is torn off, your leg is torn off, your guts are ripped out. Betrayal is deeply violent emotionally.

[11:30] Learning to forgive, let alone that that person, that husband or wife, is almost impossible. And will certainly take time, but what will end up happening is undoubtedly your ability to trust others will again be eroded.

You will struggle to trust. You are not willing to be hurt again. You put up walls, and that is completely understandable. You see, when you trust somebody and they betray you, betrayal has the effect of a carpet bomb rather than a 50 cal in the chamber of a master marksman.

It levels everything and everyone around you. It has ripple effects that destroy parts of your lives that you didn't think were necessarily connected. Betrayal is a terribly violent, violent thing.

Consider the wording here used by King David, verses 4-8. Read with me. My heart is in anguish within me. The terrors of death have fallen upon me.

Fear and trembling come upon me and horror overwhelms me. And I say, oh, that I had wings like a dove, I would fly away and be at rest. Yes, I would wander far away.

[12:56] I would lodge in the wilderness. I would hurry to find shelter from the raging wind and tempest. How very human a response to betrayal, especially verses 6-8, is escape.

An escape to the wilderness, no less. In Scripture, the place of the wilderness is where danger lurks. It's where desolation happens.

It's where the place that cannot support life apart from God's intervention. It is the place where people go to die. Here we see a desire in a sense not to exist.

And that isn't necessarily a desire to die, but to be rid of the anguish and pain. And yet, this is followed by verse 8, which is as if David shakes off such a dark thought and looks to deliverance instead of escape.

Verse 8, I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest. How often in the times of our anguish are our thoughts not very linear? We go from anger to confusion to thoughts of escape to thoughts of revenge to praying to the Lord if you are a Christian or maybe not just praying up there to the universe and then all of a sudden you are in anguish and then you are angry and then you are sad and depressed and it is all over the place our emotions.

[14:31] Here we see David expressing that very kind of kind of smorgasbord this emotion soup that is very natural and very much a human response.

Betrayal may take various forms but it sure does result in the same thing does it not? Pain for the individual. However it is not just pain for an individual betrayal has social ramifications as well and I mentioned that at the beginning.

Look with me at our text verses 9 to 11 destroy destroy oh lord divide their tongues for I see violence and strife in the city day and night they go around it on its walls and iniquity and trouble are within it ruin is in its midst oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace notice that those who betray often commit other acts that further erode society specifically in this case of the Psalms we see the city and the walls described as no longer being the very objects of safety but the objects where strife and conspiracy take place also the marketplace which is to be the very place that provides sustenance again buying and trading livelihood is again eroded and destroyed security and commerce no longer function as they ought to verse 23 speaks of such people as having blood on their hands and being treacherous these people do not build up they are not selfless they do not promote the common good but only personal gain you see betrayal is justified if it means

I succeed whether it's said or not it's to hell with everybody else and everybody else in society starts looking not like heaven but like hell things start to break down selfishness reigns supreme the breakdown of trust that accompanies betrayal will always erode always weaken always strain much more than just the two parties involved so if betrayal is so destructive and it is how are we to properly respond this brings us to our second point the response to betrayal look with me first here at verses 1 and 2 verse 9 and then verse 15 to 17 see we're jumping around quite a bit starting in verse 1 give ear to my prayer oh God and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy attend to me and answer me I am restless in my complaint and I moan verse 9 destroy oh Lord divide their tongues and then verse 15 and on let death steal over them let them go down to let them go down to

Sheol alive for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart but I call to God and the Lord will save me evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan and he God hears my voice

looking first at verses 1 to 2 we find the first example of a proper response to betrayal is in the opening verses crying out to the merciful God who hears this isn't a throw away verses 1 and 2 God delights to hear our prayers he does he doesn't have headphones in he is not ignoring us he doesn't get annoyed with our petitions look at verse 2 and then again verse 17 attend to me answer me I am restless in my complaints and I moan doesn't sound too formal does it verse 17 evening and morning and noon

[18 : 45] I utter my complaint and moan and he hears my voice God who hears and on one hand we ought to come to God with reverence because he is our creator and king but let us not forget that if we have faith in Christ Jesus he is our father and we can come to a father the perfect father just as we are broken and bruised and beat up and full of emotions that aren't linear that sometimes often times we can't make sense of we moan we complain day and night noontime all the hours we come to the Lord we come to the Lord we come to the Lord in fact throughout the Psalter throughout the Bible the Lord is not just okay but welcomes our continual petition our continual petition constantly it's like as if we are saying I'm holding you at your word I'm not letting you off the hook you have to answer me last week was the twelfth

Sunday after Trinity Sunday and the collect or the communal prayer it's one of my favorites and this is what it says almighty and everlasting God you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray and you constantly give more than we desire or deserve he's always more ready to hear than we are to pray he hears and he delights in your prayers the almighty everlasting God wants you to talk to him friends remember that truth let it seep down deep into your bones remember it when you are in peril remember it when you are full of guilt remember it when things seem perfect remember it pray to the Lord so we pray but what do we pray for what is an appropriate prayer in a situation like this well look with me at verse 9 destroy oh

Lord and divide their tongues we'll pause right there here we have an allusion to to the the tower of Babel from Genesis 11 in that story the the hubris and pride of the city of Babel it it is such that to an extent that God in both his mercy but especially his justice confuses the language of the city so that they no longer have the ability to conspire and in a sense make themselves gods I say mercy because it is a merciful thing to know the depths of your pride in the field judgment so that you may repent here David is alluding to this he is praying to the Lord that the plan of his conspirators that are seeking to betray him that have betrayed him that are it seems that are going to betray him further that all of their plans will go belly up that they will have no success that they will end their planning that it would stop working it is an appeal to reverse the progress of the enemy by consuming the enemy's ability to plot and scheme it's a very good prayer it's a prayer worth praying it really is in general it's a prayer worth praying against people that do wrong and who are going in a wrong direction and whose decisions will have effects on many people it's important to pray such prayers like this we also see that

David is desperate and calls on God and demands of him that his justice be executed and that his servant be vindicated and we see this in verse 15 and this is where it gets a bit dicey for us let death steal over them let them go down to sheol that is another term for the grave to death may they go down to sheol alive for evil is their dwelling place and in their heart it may seem rather jarring to hear from scripture that it is an acceptable thing to pray these type of prayers but we must understand that such prayers are calls for justice and vindication and not bloodthirsty revenge it's very important David is calling on God to give these evil unrepentant conspirators total justice for their grotesque behavior and it is grotesque but the question is isn't God a God of love this does not seem loving there's much more to say on the justice of

God and how it pertains and connects and is related to the love of God but I'll just say this that God's justice is never at odds with his love to love is to protect to vindicate justice so here we see that without God's complete justice he could never be a completely loving God if I love my children if I love my wife if I love my family if I love the congregation and I am not willing to fight for that to oppose evil to oppose harm to seek out justice my love is by word alone it means nothing I mean it's nice I love my children I love my wife I love the congregation but it truly means nothing it's a weak love it's an imperfect love it's a love that lacks a spine God here is a

[24 : 46] God of love precisely because he's a God of justice friends respond to betrayal mistrust calamity whatever it may be by praying to the almighty and everlasting God for his justice to take root and leave it to him I mean a big part of that is praying to God that people would turn from their wicked ways that God does not desire the death of a sinner but that they would repent and turn to

him but nevertheless there are people that do not and it is important to pray that God's justice be executed you know in a very interesting way when the enemies of God's people drive God's people to prayer the enemy has already signed and sealed his fate either they will repent and seek amendment or they will suffer the full extent of justice either in this life or the next either way they're conspiring and they're planning their betrayal will fail because it must

God will have the victory and has the victory and that is an encouragement when our emotions are all over the place when anguish has gripped our hearts when we look to God and we are praying to him and we are petitioning and we are petitioning and we are petitioning we feel like we're not being heard but God hears he has already promised a victory and this is a great bit of hope which leads to our third point our final point that we truly have hope if we are betrayed look with me verses 1 and 2 16 to 19 22 and 23 actually first we'll go to verses 16 to 19 but I call to God and the Lord will save me evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan and he hears my voice he redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage for many are arrayed against me God will give ear and humble them he who is enthroned from of old because they do not change and do not fear God cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you he will never permit the righteous to be moved pause there verse 16 but I call to God and the Lord will save me the covenant keeping covenant making covenant keeping God who will always keep his covenant I mean we mention this a lot but it's a great reminder in our English translations the capital of the full capitalization of Lord is a tip off to us that this is the covenant name of God this is the name that God uses in relationship with his people and the relationship he has with his people come with promises that he has made that he cannot not fulfill he does not break his covenant and here David is appealing to that the covenant making Lord unchanging creator God will sustain and make firm

King David and us in him we will find our firm foundation our firm identity so that we will not be shaken when the tempests come and it might feel that we are shaken but this shaken ness that David is talking about is utter eternal despair it is not saying that we will not ever feel this anguish I mean it's very clear throughout this text that that's exactly what we'll feel and this is a very human response and it doesn't mean we're weak or somehow messed up I mean we are all weak in a sense but it means that God will not allow our enemies to prevail and that eternal victory awaits this plays out in two ways we remember that Christ himself God the son of God was so utterly betrayed by the people he came to save and by his own disciple that anything that we have gone through in this life or we will go through or even the things you might be reflecting upon now will never come near to that level of betrayal which means we have a

God that can relate to us he knows the depths that we have gone through and if you have a friend that you have confided in that can relate to you that's a I mean there's commiseration but there's more than that you feel heard because they know precisely what you're going through that is a beautiful thing now times that infinitely because we have a God who has identified with us in our brokenness in our humanity to the extent that there is nothing we can go through in this case with betrayal and the breakdown of trust that he can't relate to I mean that is a wonderful beautiful comforting truth something that we need to think about and dwell on God doesn't just hear you Christ doesn't just hear your prayers but can completely relate to your anguish the second thing we remember that because of sin and brokenness our sin and brokenness that we ourselves in a sense are betrayers but who did we betray we betrayed the creator

[30 : 30] God the triune God the creator of heaven and earth who made us and gave us life and we rejected and abandoned his ways and his very real hope for hopelessness that pretended to be real hope but but ultimately a hope that is not rooted in him which is hopelessness we rejected God we betrayed God but you know God doesn't treat us as evil doers to smite us to send us down to Sheol to the grave and yet this mercy that extends to us by not treating us that way and yet his justice is still enacted it is still executed but instead of us paying the penalty he lays it on Christ Jesus he pours out his justice on God the Son of God who dies the death of a traitor even though he was no such thing such a miscarriage of justice was

Christ on the cross and yet at the same time the most beautiful picture of grace and mercy and love that has ever happened and will ever happen friends this is why the cross of Christ is so precious because it is both the means by which we are saved and made right by faith and it is also the means by which we can trust that the God who hears our prayers knows our anguish and promises to act on our behalf so friends as it says in the that you provide for us what we need to endure and it is very hard and it is at times it feels like part of us is torn apart that we could only wish to escape to

that we don't want to die but certainly we don't want to live if this is what living feels like and yet your great promise to us is that justice will be exacted upon those that will destroy and that the anguish we might feel will never be our eternal reality but rather we will enjoy pure peace forever because of Christ on the cross Lord help us to be people that are strong in you help us to be people that remember that you can relate to us help us to be people that remember the cross go with us be with us help us pray this in Christ mighty name amen