

# Fifth Sunday of Easter

## LOVE HANDED OVER: THE GLORIOUS LIGHT OF GOD'S NEW DAY

John 13:31-35

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### Analysis by Paul Jaster

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

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## DIAGNOSIS: Love Betrayed (Jesus Handed to the Enemy)

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Demonic Betrayal*

Betrayal is to "hand over" someone who loves you to the power of an enemy by treachery and disloyalty. Judas sells out Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and hands over the very one who is Love (Jesus) to the enemy (the temple guard) with a phony affectionate gesture (a kiss). How often have we sold out Jesus for something less while still faking love all the time? Such betrayal is demonic, says Jesus, who calls the one who betrays

him “a devil” (6:70). There are no exorcisms in John. No temptation of Jesus. Satan’s sole role in this gospel is that of a thieving and murderous “betrayer” through and through—through Judas and through us. Satan works through human means, as does God. All this is embedded in the first five words, “When he had gone out...”

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : A Faithless Lust for Self-survival**

Our murderous betrayal of Jesus betrays (a) a lack of trust in the promises of God offered through Jesus, (b) a hearty lust for self-survival, and (c) having the wrong father. The word “betrays” here means to reveal a secret, or that which should be kept secret (according to the perpetrator, at least). Judas is a “thief” who cares nothing for the poor sinners befriended by God. Judas wants to seize control, hold the purse, and turn the wheel of fortune to his advantage. Behind all this is the survivor mentality articulated by his co-conspirators, the chief priests and Pharisees, who know that if they let Jesus go on like this, the Romans will come and destroy their holy place and nation. We love our “holy places”: our self-righteous, privileged positions of power and glory. Nor, do we give them up easily without a fight. Jesus repeats: this shows we are from the devil, the father of lies and whose nature has become our own (8:44).

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : A God-Forsaken Darkness**

Ultimately, Satan’s empty promise of self-survival is exposed. For it dead-ends against the reality of the true Father—God’s promise and God’s law. All that Jesus has to do is utter the divine name, “I AM,” and Satan and his cohorts get knocked to the ground like dead men, including Judas, who is never heard from again. His co-conspirators, experts in the Torah, speak God’s own truth when they say to Pilate, “We have a law, and

according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.” Except that they have the wrong perpetrator. We are the ones who “ought to die” for our divine pretenses and love-betrayals. When we separate ourselves from the Father’s agape love in Jesus and turn ourselves into survivalists, we turn ourselves into little gods. And that is blasphemy, the penalty for which is death. Apart from Jesus, God “hands us betrayers over” to the “last enemy,” Death. This is betrayal in its old (some would say obsolete-don’t we wish!) Shakespearean sense of “to hand over to punishment.” When Judas steps out the door to “do quickly” what he is going to do, John notes that he goes out into the “night” (read “death’s darkness”), and Judas never sees the light of day again. It could not be clearer that Judas is fatally separating himself both from that one love that gives him life (Jesus) AND the community among whom that love is lived (the other disciples). It is curtains for us, as we make the same deadly moves, too. That is the bad news.

## **PROGNOSIS: Love Bestowed (Jesus Handed to the Enemy)**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : A Glorious Reversal**

The good news is that Caiaphas spoke the Gospel truth when he said, “It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” At first, it looks like this is yet another betrayal; this time by God. God handing over someone who loves him (God’s own Son) to the power of the last enemy (Death). Only this is not done out of disloyalty and treachery. Rather, it is the highest expression of faithfulness and love. “Greater love has no one than this, than that one lays down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus dies the very traitor’s death we deserve voluntarily and vicariously, “for us” and in our stead. One man for all the people. And yet, Jesus is also who he says he is, the Son of God. And so, his lifting up

upon the cross is an “execution” of God’s judgment on those who blaspheme God and betray God’s love. Jesus did deserve to die-for guilt by association. But it also simultaneously is a glorious “exaltation” because it enacts God’s truest and most faithful love. And that, in turn, is vindicated and proven true in a resurrection and ascension that results in a “return” to the Father, both for Jesus and for us. Only we cannot “go to God” the way that Jesus did through his ascension (“Where I am going, you cannot come”). Rather, the Father and the Son “come to us” in Spirit (see Step 6 below). Talk about Survivor! Jesus is the last man standing. His obedient death and resurrection becomes the way of life and a visible manifestation of God’s glory. And death is defeated. “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.” This is the very way that God wants his powerful agape love be made known and available to those who dare believe it. Amazingly, God hands Love (Jesus) over to the enemy (us sinners) in an awesome way that turns us sinners into friends. No, not just friends, but children. Little children. The most beloved little children of our great God-Father. This is not betrayal. It is “bestowal.” The presentation of a gift.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Agape (a Daily Dying in God’s Self-Sacrificial Love)*

And to these children of the true Father-of-Well-Kept-Promises, Jesus hands over a new commandment: “that you love one another.” Which Jesus immediately restates in this key sentence: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” Or, should we read this key sentence: “I have loved you in order that you also love one another”? (This also is a valid reading, says Raymond Brown; AB 29a, II.607.) Jesus does not just raise the standard, he alters the situation. Jesus does not just give us the pattern, he gives us the power. He doesn’t just point us to a new and better GPS, but he gives us the fuel to propel us

forward. This is not an “old commandment,” which judges and accuses you if you don’t keep it. This is a “new commandment,” which enables and empowers you to love as Christ loved you—because it crucifies you with Christ himself. Which is to say that any act of Christian love is nothing less than a death and resurrection in Christ. Some things are going to have to die for us to love as Christ loved us: Some of our own choices and preferences for one thing. Certain hopes and dreams and freedoms. Debating points die. Rights die. Pride dies. Fairness dies. Self-pity dies. The right to pout and whine, the right to experience righteous indignation—it all dies.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : A Godly Bestowal**

And in its place something new is born. A faithful community of believers who love as Christ loved us. A bunch of holy co-conspirators who truly do love one another and who faithfully pass on the love that they themselves have received from God to others. This kind of co-conspiratorial love betrays, that is, it “reveals,” (a) trust in the promises of God offered in Christ, (b) an honest love for Jesus and a willingness to die, and (c) knowing one’s true heavenly Father. This kind of love (agape) is possible for us children of God only because when Jesus died he “handed over” his Spirit to us (John 19:30) much like the handing over the rabbis did when they “handed over the tradition” to the next generation. Except it is not a Torah-based oral and written tradition that Jesus gives but a holy, life-giving, and loving Spirit that fills an entire community of believers and pulls them into one. In short, Easter is Pentecost. The Holy Ghost is the fuel; the Paraclete is the power; Christ’s own spark, the Spirit, ignites and feeds the flames of love that give witness to a Living Lord. It is a love that is “handed over” even to one’s enemies and to the poorest of the poor. What can co-conspirators do except to follow the lead of the chief Life-Giving, Love-Bestowing Spiritor? This

agape love burns bright and warm like the summer sun and is the very light of God's new day. Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!