

**DARKNESS REIGNS**  
**Sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent, 2019**  
**Luke 22:39-53**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 22:39-53: <sup>39</sup> **Jesus came out and went to the Mount of Olives, as He usually did, and His disciples also followed Him.** <sup>40</sup> **When He reached the place, He told them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation!”**

<sup>41</sup> **He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and began to pray:** <sup>42</sup> **“Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me! However, let not My will, but Yours, be done!”**

<sup>43</sup> **An angel appeared to Him from heaven and strengthened Him.** <sup>44</sup> **He began to be in anguish, and prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like clots of blood falling down to the ground.** <sup>45</sup> **When He rose up from the prayer and came to the disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow.** <sup>46</sup> **He asked them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray, that you may not enter into temptation!”**

<sup>47</sup> **While He was still speaking, they saw a crowd, and the man who was called “Judas,” one of the Twelve, was coming in front of them. He came close to Jesus to kiss Him.**

<sup>48</sup> **However, Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”**

<sup>49</sup> **When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they asked, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?”**

<sup>50</sup> **A certain one of them struck the servant of the chief priest and cut off his right ear.** <sup>51</sup> **However, Jesus answered, “Stop! No more of this!” Then He touched his ear and healed him.**

<sup>52</sup> **Then Jesus asked those who had come for Him, the chief priests, the captains of the temple, and the elders: “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not stretch out your hands against Me. Rather, this is your hour, when darkness reigns.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Year after year as Lent comes, we are given the opportunity to follow the Saviour along His way of sorrows. Each time we take that well-known way, we penetrate further into the significance of its mystery and perceive aspects of truth that have been previously hidden. The effect this has upon us may be summed up in two words: repentance and faith.

The story of Jesus’ Passion so plainly reveals our sin that we simply must repent. The story of Jesus’ Passion so plainly reveals the love of the Lord that we simply must believe. The text before us today from Luke’s Gospel emphasises the former: our sin and the need of repentance, concluding with the solemn statement: **this is your hour, when darkness reigns**.

**Darkness reigns.** We see this first of all in the weakness of the disciples.

The touching scenes in the upper room have concluded. Jesus has prayed for His disciples and all people.<sup>1</sup> Now <sup>39</sup> **Jesus came out and went to the Mount of Olives, as He usually did, and His disciples also followed Him.** <sup>40</sup> **When He reached the place, He told them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation!”** The disciples are now facing their most severe ordeal. The devil will tempt them to give up their faith in Jesus as God’s promised Messiah. Satan had asked for permission to sift them as wheat.<sup>2</sup> Both before and after His own anguished imploring prayer to His heavenly Father, Jesus urges His disciples to pray so that they do not succumb to the evil power of Satan and fall into his trap.

Then Jesus **withdrew from them about a stone’s throw** to pray.<sup>3</sup> A stone’s throw was only about 30 metres away. Mark tells us in his Gospel that Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him a little further into the Garden, before

<sup>1</sup> John 17

<sup>2</sup> Luke 22:31

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 26:36

telling them to remain where they were while He went a little further still.<sup>4</sup> What follows concerns only Him and His heavenly Father.

All the furies of hell are unleashed upon Jesus as He **knelt down, and began to pray:**<sup>42</sup> **“Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me! However, let not My will, but Yours, be done!”** This is the cup of God’s wrath,<sup>5</sup> the punishment for the sins of the world. Yet what ultimately matters to Jesus is not His own will but the will of His Father. The Father’s answer to His Son is to send an angel.<sup>43</sup> **An angel appeared to Him from heaven and strengthened Him.** Still His anguish continues, and **His sweat became like clots of blood falling down to the ground.**

Here, as much as anywhere in the gospel record, the true human nature of Jesus is revealed. There is nothing fake about His sufferings. No human being can fully understand what agony He experienced. As Isaiah once prophesied, *“He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings,”* (Isaiah 53:5). This suffering was inflicted upon Him by others. This is the theology of grace. An innocent man - the Servant of the LORD - suffered for the sins of others. He substituted Himself for sinners. But alas, during all this agonising the men who were so willing to die with Him cannot even stay awake. Matthew records that *three times* He returned to find the disciples asleep!<sup>6</sup> He wrestles with death, and they sleep.

There we see **when darkness reigns** in these disciples. They are **sleeping from sorrow.** This is a sad indication of their own grief, fear, and misunderstanding of what is about to happen. They let themselves go. They doze off. They will not understand that all these things must be if His work is to be done. They look at His suffering not as the divine method of saving the world but simply as a great blow to them, the death of all their hopes. Their weakness is a lack of faith, therefore they sleep **from sorrow.**

The same weakness appears even more clearly in their rage at His impending arrest.<sup>49</sup> **When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they asked, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?”** Then <sup>50</sup> **A certain one of them (Simon Peter)<sup>7</sup> struck the servant of the chief priest and cut off his right ear.**

The disciple’s lack of understanding is once more evident. They do not understand that these things must be. It is a momentary exhibition of *false strength.* Immediately after Jesus was arrested, all the disciples forsook Him and fled.<sup>8</sup> **Darkness reigns** and controls them completely on the night when He was betrayed.

That same weakness can also be found in us. Often, our own faith is nothing to boast of. When we should be marching courageously forward, we often sleep **from sorrow** and act as though there were no loving Father in heaven. Perhaps more so today than ever before, these are days that try men’s souls. Are we manifesting a calm confidence that in the words of the Apostle Paul *“all things work together for good to them that love God”*?<sup>9</sup> Or do our hearts, too, fail us as we *“fearfully wait for the things that are coming on the world”*?<sup>10</sup> Surely, if we are honest, we must confess to having a frequent failure of faith. And what does such a confession mean? Simply that **darkness reigns,** swaying us, too. All unbelief is sin, and all sin is unbelief and a reliance on self rather than on God - a failure to yield to Him in faith and love. We, too, must heed the warning words of the Lord, **“Pray that you may not enter into temptation!”**

**Darkness reigns.** We see this second of all in the treachery of Judas.

In Judas, the sin which has its inception in unbelief appears in still darker hues. The disciples sleep; that is the beginning. Judas betrays; that is the end.

<sup>47</sup> **While (Jesus) was still speaking, they saw a crowd, and the man who was called “Judas,” one of the Twelve, was coming in front of them. He came close to Jesus to kiss Him.**

One of Jesus’ own was leading the way and points Him out. Jesus asks: **“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?** That is sin - there can be no doubt about it. Jesus had chosen Judas and lavished upon him His love, and Judas delivers Him into the hand of His foes. Jesus had given Judas his all, and Judas sold Him for thirty pieces of

<sup>4</sup> Mark 14:33

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 51:17

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 26:40-45

<sup>7</sup> John 18:10

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 26:56

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>10</sup> Luke 21:26

silver. A kiss is given. In the ancient world, a kiss was a common greeting between those who shared fellowship and intimacy. This token of love and friendship is made to serve the designs of greed and enmity, and even Jesus' tender rebuke failed to move the traitor. That is the peak of sin. Ingratitude, greed, and duplicity, all are united in one monstrous deed of treachery that has made Judas the object of universal scorn.

We detest Judas. We cannot find words strong enough to condemn him, yet, how many of us at the same time condemn ourselves. Why? because even today, disciples of Jesus Christ still betray their Lord. How? Well, what about those who profess faith in Him and yet deliberately refuse to do what they know to be His will? Will not Jesus say to them, **“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”** What about those who address Him, *“Lord, Lord,”*<sup>11</sup> and yet for some seeming advantage, for thirty pieces of silver, and often for much less, give Him up? The demands that the Church makes upon their time and cheque-books are *too great*; the sacrifices needed by a thorough-going fellowship with Jesus Christ are *too costly*. Rather than coming to church on Sunday such people would rather sleep in or find something less boring to do. Instead of leading a clean and decent life, they would prefer to have their fling; rather than give to Christ and His cause they would rather spend it all on themselves. Ultimately Jesus Christ and His Church know them no more. Is that betrayal or is it not? Is there anything in your life now that would compel the Lord to ask you: **“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”**

The treason of Judas does not appear all of a sudden as full-blown, rather, it was the result of a gradual process. There is a mystery here. We cannot determine just how the power of darkness reigning managed to gain such mastery over one of Christ's chosen Twelve. Yet the Scriptures give us a clue. *Greed* was the dominant passion of Judas.<sup>12</sup> Even having an intimate companionship with Jesus could not eradicate that passion. In fact, this very intimacy brought it to a head. In Christ's company all hidden things are dragged into the light. Being brought forth, they either are cast out, or they cause our eventual separation from Christ – even being directed against Him with furious bitterness. Such is the effect that Jesus has on men. Many will play around with Jesus, having some kind of “outward connection” with His Church. This is how it is with those who may have once sat in our pews, but now have decided it is easier and more enjoyable to stay at home and not come at all, or at least only on festival days and so forth. Of course, such people can continue as they are indefinitely because in reality, Jesus Christ means nothing to them anyhow. But if anyone has entered into any vital relationship with Him, then there is a clean-cut *either/or*: either one will listen to His loving admonition and strenuously seek to get rid of everything that fails to measure up to His perfection, or His words will merely make one sore; you will be disgusted, and you will quit. And from then on you will hate Him. Jesus is Light to which all darkness flees from His presence. Either the darkness flees out of you, or you will love darkness more than light; and driven by the power of darkness, you will flee from, and fight against, the light.

Judas did the latter. Jesus was all love. Judas was all - Judas. His greed ruled supreme. With the other disciples, Judas may have hoped for a glorious earthly kingdom of the Lord. Once that had been achieved, he would be in power and could indulge to his heart's content his desire for gain. But it became clearer and clearer that Jesus had no intention of establishing such a kingdom. Even the rousing reception He received when He entered Jerusalem did not alter His plans. Through suffering and death, Jesus would ascend His throne. Judas was through. Gain he must have, if not in one way, then in another, and so he went and sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver.

Today we stand in the presence of the Son of God. Light streams from Him. Does it disclose anything in our hearts that is mean and nasty, ugly and selfish? Is there some power of darkness that rules and will not let Him rule us? With His help it can be cast out. Our Lord stands by and leads us in the fight. The story of Judas is a warning lesson for us to do away with the darkness before it cuts us off from Him!

Finally, **darkness reigns** in the conduct of the Jews.

Judas gives the sign. The arrest of Jesus follows. The real instigators are disclosed: the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.<sup>13</sup> To them Jesus says: **“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not stretch out your hands against Me. Rather, this is your hour, when darkness reigns.”**

Jesus had taught them in the Temple. Often, as we heard today in our Gospel, He had wanted to bring them together

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 7:21

<sup>12</sup> John 12:1-8

<sup>13</sup> Mark 14:43

as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but they were not willing.<sup>14</sup> Instead, they paid back His love with murderous hatred. He was defenceless, but they came out to Him **with swords and clubs**, deadly weapons, as though He were a dangerous criminal. They even made the arrest at night, fearing the light of day.

But their sin went even further. They thought that they were carrying out their own designs. They had bought Judas for thirty pieces of silver. They despised him as a hireling. When they were through with him, they tossed him aside. The lemon was squeezed dry, and they themselves were no better. They, too, were being used. Jesus told them, “**This is your hour, when darkness reigns.**”

God had given them this hour to carry out their desperate plans. The power of darkness was permitted to wreak all its awful fury upon Him who was to be pierced for our rebellious acts and bruised for our wrongdoings. Those who came out to arrest Jesus were nothing but the agents of that infernal power. So, God’s plan was carried out. They planned evil against Jesus, but God planned good to come from it.

This is a mystery in which we with our finite minds simply cannot fathom, but we know the result, and that is enough. The Son of God drank to the very last dregs the cup of suffering, making us free. As the Apostle Paul once said, “*God made Him who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God,*” (2 Cor. 5:21).

But what a fearful thing sin is! It is a manifestation of when **darkness reigns**. The Jews here were its slaves. They were doing the devil’s bidding. In him we see the deepest depths of sin. It is he that has been sinning from the beginning.<sup>15</sup> Every sin links us with the devil. Every sin puts us under his power. So we must look into those awful depths and then look into our own hearts. There, too, we find sin. Then, having seen in the arrest of the Son of God what sin really is, the sin in our hearts looks quite different. That sin which seems so trifling to us, those evil impulses in which we carelessly indulge, those weaknesses which we condone, all these are identical with the sin that we see in the Garden of Gethsemane. We shrink back in horror and disgust from the treachery of Judas and from the brutality of the Jews. We shudder at the ugly sight that here greet our eyes. But then we must also stand horrified as we inspect our own hearts. There, too, **darkness reigns**, pulling us down into those awful depths. We cannot point fingers of scorn at the sleeping disciples. We cannot feel outraged over the kiss of Judas. We cannot condemn the murderous Jews. Instead, to dispel this darkness, we must, with John the Baptist, look to Jesus and proclaim, “*Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). Jesus is that Lamb of God who has come to give Himself as the sacrifice to win forgiveness for us. He is the Passover Lamb whose blood has saved us from death,<sup>16</sup> the sin offering through which we receive forgiveness.<sup>17</sup> Darkness no longer reigns, for the Light of the world has come, who has died and risen again for us. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for Your marvellous grace to sinful people. You dwell in a light that no one can approach, but You have now shown Yourself to us in Your Son Jesus Christ. Through Him we approach You confidently as Your dear children. You are the Creator and Ruler of this vast universe, yet You are concerned for the happiness and good of each one of us. Accept our humble worship and praise, and grant that we may continue in our gracious fellowship with You through Jesus Christ.

We thank You, Father, that You have chosen us not to suffer Your anger, but to receive Your forgiveness, and to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for us. Move us to hear and obey Your Son through whom You have spoken to us. Move us to follow the example that Jesus has given us. Open our hearts, that Jesus may continue to live in them. Grant that we may cling to Jesus as the only way through which people may come into Your glorious presence. Move us, both by the way in which You shape our lives, and through Your promises in the Gospel, to make our own commitment to You, in love, praise, and adoration.

Grant that we may walk in obedience to Your commandments, test all things by Your Word, cling to what is good, and have nothing to do with any kind of evil. Make us holy by Your Spirit to live the life of holiness, to which Christ

<sup>14</sup> Luke 13:34

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 3:8

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 12:1-3

<sup>17</sup> Leviticus 4:32-35

has called us, and keep us free of all fault until His coming.

Father, since You desire all people to be saved and to come to know the truth, give us opportunities to proclaim Your Gospel to the ends of the earth. Inspire us to work, pray, and give for the salvation of people who as yet do not know You.

Grant that all in authority in our country may respect Your holy will. Protect from harm those who are in danger. Give peace and harmony to the nations on earth. Grant to us seasons that are appropriate to our needs, so that our farmers can continue their work of feeding the world.

Make our homes harmonious places where the Holy Spirit is present with His power and wisdom. Give spiritual insight to all mothers. Grant all fathers godly leadership. Give all children an obedient spirit.

Have mercy on all who have gathered here today. Support the weak; correct the disobedient. Comfort us whenever we are troubled in body, mind, or spirit. We ask these things, and everything else we need, in the name of Your Son Jesus, who gave His life as a ransom for us all. Amen.

## SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Jeremiah 26:8-15

<sup>8</sup> When Jeremiah had finished speaking everything that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests, the prophets and all the people took hold of him and said, “You will certainly die! <sup>9</sup> Why have you been prophesying in the name of the LORD, saying, ‘This Temple will be like Shiloh, and this city will be desolate, with no one living in it’?”

Then all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the Temple of the LORD. <sup>10</sup> When the officials of Judah heard about these things, they came up from the king’s palace to the Temple of the LORD and sat down at the entrance of the New Gate of the Temple of the LORD.

<sup>11</sup> Then the priests and the prophets told the officials and all the people, “This man should be condemned to death because he has been prophesying against this city, as you have heard!”

<sup>12</sup> Then Jeremiah told all the officials and all the people: “The LORD has sent me to prophesy against this Temple and against this city all the Words that you have heard. <sup>13</sup> Now therefore, reform your ways and your deeds and listen to the voice of the LORD, your God, that the LORD may relent about the calamity that He has pronounced against you! <sup>14</sup> However, as for me, look! I am in your hands. Do to me what you think is good and right! <sup>15</sup> Only you should know for certain that, if you put me to death, you will certainly make yourselves, this city and those who live in it responsible for killing an innocent person. For in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these Words in your hearing.”

Philippians 3:17-4:1

<sup>17</sup> My fellow-Christians, keep on imitating me and taking note of those who live according to the example we are giving you! <sup>18</sup> For I have often told you and now tell you with tears, that many live as the enemies

of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> In the end they will be destroyed. Their own feelings are their god. They glory in their shame, and their minds are on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> For we are citizens of heaven and look for the Lord Jesus Christ to come from heaven as the Saviour. <sup>21</sup> He will change our humble bodies and make them like His glorified body, because He has the power by which He can make everything subordinate to Himself.

<sup>4:1</sup> So, my fellow-Christians, dearly loved people, for whom I long, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord!

Luke 13:31-35

<sup>31</sup> Right at that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and told Him, “Leave here and go away! For Herod wants to kill You.”

<sup>32</sup> He answered them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Look! Today and tomorrow I am driving out demons and working healings and on the third day I shall be perfected!’ <sup>33</sup> Nevertheless I must be on My way today, tomorrow and the next day, because it is impossible that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.

<sup>34</sup> “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one that kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to it! How often I have wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you have not been willing! <sup>35</sup> Look! Your house is abandoned to your disadvantage. I also tell you, you certainly will not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”