***SPY WEDNESDAY - “mine own familiar friend”***

At about this point in Holy Week we often hear about clergy and lay leaders already being “tired out.” Palm Sunday is past, and occasionally clergy take off the next day, but the laity don’t usually have that opportunity. By Wednesday people are going over details related to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Great Vigil, and Easter Sunday, and by that Easter Monday most people are worn out - but again Choir, Altar Guild members, Servers, etc. hear the wakeup call on Monday morning - not a day off for them!!

So, it is easy to lose the Wednesday in Holy Week which is commonly called “Spy Wednesday” acknowledging the tradition that this was the day that the Apostle Judas Iscariot was “cutting a deal” with the Jewish authorities. This is the day when we recall that passive-aggressive behavior, deceit and methods of betrayal were already in full force. It is not uncommon for Psalm 55 to be one of the appointed Psalms for Liturgical recitation on Spy Wednesday - with an amazing focus on verses 12-15, and 21. Since we are often on Holy Wednesday so concerned about the Triduum (the three days) it is easy to allow the plotting and scheming associated with this day to be forgotten, and yet in terms of all that lies before us, Spy Wednesday is critical. So here is the question: “Have you ever been betrayed?”

I am a very blessed man. In nearly 76 years of life, 48 years as a Deacon (4/20/74), nearly 48 years as a Priest (12/21/74) and nearly 28 years as a Bishop (6/29/94) I have rarely been betrayed. I have never been betrayed by a family member, and I was never betrayed as a Parish Priest: (1974-1994). I am a remarkably blessed man. I used to be able to say that I only recall being betrayed once, and now I can recall being betrayed twice - BUT am I not a blessed man? Most of my ministry has meant having direct communications with people, not speaking behind peoples’ backs, not saying “bless their hearts, but…” or “if you keep it under the seal, I will tell you why I hate…….”. Obviously, this excludes what I hear in a Confessional...but I’m the listener and I’m the one who tries to help people with amendment of life to prevent more brokenness. I see that with my children and grandchildren loving them means that I don’t have to tell them my opinion on every subject, and cross words have never been spoken among us, nor painful days of not being on speaking terms.

But Psalm 55:12-14 cuts to the quick. Jesus could not say what I have just said about relationships, because in spite of Him giving all for us, He was betrayed by human beings and He continues to be denied and betrayed to this very day. Look at the following verses through the eyes of Jesus, remembering that the Psalms were “His Prayer Book”:

“For it is not an open enemy that hath done this dishonor, for then I could have borne it. Neither was it mine adversary that did magnify himself against me, for then, peradventure I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou, my companion, my guide, and **mine own familiar** **friend**. We took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as friends.”

Verse 21: “He laid his hands upon such as be at peace with him, and brake his covenant.”

(Coverdale version)

“For it is not an enemy who has done me this dishonor, for then I could have borne it. Neither was it an enemy who exalted himself against me, for then I would have hidden myself from him. But it was you, my companion, my comrade and my own familiar friend. We took sweet counsel together and walked in the house of God as friends.” “My familiar friend has laid his hands upon those who were at peace with him, and he has broken his covenant.”

(2019 Book of Common Prayer Psalter)

It would be so easy for us to speak ill of Judas, the Betrayer, as we appropriately do, but what about us? If we look carefully at Judas, we need to ask ourselves if we were living during the time of Jesus and had heard so many negative things said about Jesus, what would we have done? Do we make pronouncements on people on the basis of second-hand information? Do we perpetuate gossip by repeating simply what we have heard? When we are upset with someone do we negate and forget all the good that they ever did and only talk about what we do not like about them — often never even discussing with them our perspective? All of those behaviors lead to betrayal, and on Good Friday many self-righteous people felt that they had been justified in shouting “Crucify Him.” What is fascinating is to consider after the Resurrection on Sunday, was there a shifting of opinion? How can people go from being fed on Maundy Thursday and having their feet washed, skip ahead to the Resurrection and not ask themselves what part they may have played and continue to play, even unwittingly, in Betrayal?

Betrayal is often due to the need to be in control, and when we perceive that what we judge in the other to be other than what we want…or we would do…we react. At the heart of betrayal is Pride. We need to remember that Jesus was not the kind of Messiah that most people wanted because He did not fulfill their preconceived notions. It draws us to a difficult point: if Jesus is the Lord of our life and He is our Savior why do we still believe that we have the right to judge others as harshly as we do…and then as a final dramatic act… betray them.

So, why bother with this “awkward” liturgical day — Holy Wednesday/Wednesday in Holy Week? Spy Wednesday? After all isn’t it just easier to go from Palm Sunday to Maundy Thursday? Or is today the day when we look inside ourselves and ask**, “If I were alive during the time of Jesus, would I have betrayed Him.” “Do I have within me the potential of betrayal?”**

**“Is it I, Lord?”**