

Betrayal
(Part 2)
Read Mark 14:12-31

Like the anticipatory pause between lightning knifing through the heavens and its thunderous response, so was the momentary quiet of the twelve men reclining around the Passover table following Jesus' pronouncement. Voices that had been raised and lowered in familiar conversation that only three years of close companionship could have forged halted with incredulity. Bodies of variable sizes, lengths, and ages, previously reposing on cushioned mats that had been positioned around a low-lying table, stiffened. Astonishment, though initially suppressing a rebuttal, inevitably provoked a discharge of denials from each: "It can't be me, can it?" Jesus, whose assertion that one of them would betray Him, bewildered them still further. He re-stated that His betrayer was among the twelve who were dining with Him.

Peter, a disciple who allowed himself to be subordinate only to Jesus, noted that Jesus' attention was settling back onto the ancient feast, so he jerked his head for the others to continue eating. *Why must he be so puzzling? What does he mean by asserting that one of us will deny him?* Peter scrutinized Jesus as Jesus took some of the thin unleavened bread that was appropriate for the Passover meal since inception, blessed it, broke it into enough pieces to feed all, and then distributed it among the men. *None of us would ever harm him in any way, let alone deny him. We have been together three years, and I know of no such evil within our company.* Peter swallowed the bread in time for Jesus to lay hold of a cup sitting before him and give thanks. *Why, just the other day, Judas demonstrated his care for the afflicted by despairing over the waste of premium perfume on a human (even though it was Jesus himself who had received the pricy anointment) rather than its sale to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. Does that not tell Jesus that we are not traitorous?* As they passed the cup of wine around for each to sip from it, Jesus said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." *There he goes again, referring to death. How are we to interpret these statements concerning his blood and its being poured out for many? What does that have to do with drinking wine in the kingdom that should have burst upon this Roman controlled land of ours by now?* Peter flicked off the crumbs from the hair encircling his mouth and stumbled to his feet (*should have eaten and drunk less...won't be able to stay awake much longer*) singing one of the Psalms that accompanied the completion of the feast as the disciples traipsed toward the Mount called Olives.

On the way, Jesus returned to the subject of betrayal, as though the meal had only been a required interruption into his discourse. As they passed along corridors of entryways sprinkled by the blood of slaughtered Passover lambs, he said, "You are all going to fall away." Peter swept his eyes toward Jesus, astounded. Not one but all the men were included in Jesus' accusation. "Because," Jesus continued, "it is written, 'I will strike down the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.'" Before Peter could utter an agonized cry of refusal, Jesus said, "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." Not listening to the hope offered, Peter, incredulous that Jesus would speak so, sputtered as he said, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not." Jesus met Peter's pleadings with directness: "Be assured that on this very night, before a rooster

crows twice, you will deny me three times.” Peter exhaled with a groan. How could Jesus have misread him? “No, no, no! Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you!” But Jesus turned around to move forward toward Gethsemane amid voices which clamored innocence.

The above narrative, found in Mark 14:17-31, accentuates one of Mark’s literary techniques known as a “sandwich.” This technique draws the reader’s attention to the author’s critical point. The story begins with Jesus’ prediction of a betrayal--by one person--and concludes with a prediction of a betrayal—by many. Like the two slices of bread in a sandwich, these two parts envelope a middle section (lunchmeat) comprising the last meal of Jesus before His crucifixion. It is truly a table of grace, for the disciples who participate will betray Him. Thus, this sandwich technique emphasizes the significant contrast between disciples vulnerable to the same devious sin nature that plagues each of us, and the mercy of a Savior who opens wide the doors of communion with them and with us.