

Sermon for Wednesday of Holy Week  
April 12, 2006  
First Baptist Church, Blowing Rock, NC  
The Reverend Jeanne Finan

**Put me in, coach...**

I grew up in a family that was obsessed with baseball.  
Growing up, my grandmother always told me that my parents insisted  
the only lullaby that would put me to sleep  
was the song, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."  
And they didn't sing it quietly, she told me,  
"They sang at the top of their lungs!"

As soon as the weather warmed up,  
when we were barely old enough to walk,  
my father had us all—my mother, my older sister, my little brother, me--  
and usually the neighbor kids--  
out in the back yard after supper.  
Playing baseball.

Now our yard wasn't exactly the field of dreams.  
We lived in a very small house—tiny by today's standards.  
And our backyard was equally tiny.  
But to my Dad it was Wrigley Field, Fenway Park, Yankee Stadium—  
all rolled into one.  
And we would PLAY BALL!!  
Until finally my mother would say,  
"Jack, it's dark! The game IS over."

So even though it has been years since I played baseball,  
I still sometimes dream about baseball.

On Monday night I had one of these baseball dreams.  
Jesus was on third base. Looking towards home.  
Judas was on second base.  
First base was empty.  
Jesus looks over at Judas.  
Judas gives a signal to the pitcher  
who then turns to the batter...  
And then,  
I woke up.

In fact, I not only woke up.  
I got up.

What on earth am I doing dreaming about Jesus and Judas playing baseball?!!!  
(Please, God, please tell me, I was not the person coming up to bat!!)

Now, in a way, this dreamy baseball game,  
is not a half-bad metaphor for Holy Week.

Third base is Palm Sunday.  
Home plate is Easter morning.  
And Jesus is moving—in slow motion—towards home.

But why is Judas on second base?  
Because the batter is going to bunt.  
Bunt left and bunt very short.  
And with first base open,  
with the batter bunting,  
you do not want the guy on third to run home.  
because he's going to get tagged out.  
Everybody needs to stay put and let that batter make it to first,  
load the bases and wait for the next player to hit a homerun.

But it doesn't happen that way.  
The batter bunts.  
Judas immediately leaves second base and starts running towards third base.  
Jesus turns to see Judas coming right towards him  
And Jesus is forced to begin his run to home plate.  
And the catcher is waiting there, the ball in his hand, his foot on home plate.

There is a part of us,  
that wants Jesus—and certainly Judas-- to just stay put.  
There is a part of us that wants to shout out from the stands,  
No! Don't run! Don't run!

But run he does. Right towards Jerusalem.

And we want to blame Judas.  
We want to have a scapegoat.  
To make it one person's fault.  
Why, that lousy Judas, how could he do such a terrible thing?  
Everything was just going along great  
until Judas went and did what he did.  
Jesus never should have called Judas to be a disciple.  
That lousy Judas.  
How could one of Jesus' most beloved  
do something like that? How?!!

How?

Take a look in the mirror.

Take a look at the actions in our own lives.

Take a look at the very bad choices we have sometimes made,  
as individuals, as churches, as nations, as the world.

Take a look at

the very hurtful words we have sometimes said,  
the very sneaky ways we have gone behind someone's back  
to get our own way

or maybe just to pass the time and do a little gossip damage.

Take a look at the times we have put money ahead of people, of relationships.

**We** are the most beloved,  
the children of God.

Yet we, too, have a Judas side.

It is the dark side of our lives that separates us from God.

Not because God has any desire to be separated from us,  
but because our own fears keep us from trusting God.

Our own anxieties and ambitions

make us want to control how the game will turn out.

Our own jealousies and self-centeredness

make us want to be the one to post the team roster,  
to have others benched or thrown out of the game  
or not invited to play at all.

It is our own self-glorification project that has us daydream  
about being chosen Jesus' MVPP—

Most Valuable and Pious Player!!

Pick me! Pick me!

The gospel of John says that Jesus was troubled in spirit that night.

I don't think Jesus felt troubled knowing that he would be betrayed.

He doesn't really seem bothered by that at all.

He simply says to Judas,

*Do quickly what you are going to do.*

Jesus accepts that he will be with his friends

only a little longer.

Surely Jesus already knows he crossed over the line  
that would lead him to his death a long time ago.

I think Jesus is troubled because someone he loves,  
his dear friend Judas,  
this friend is about to betray his own heart.

When we act or speak or treat others—or ourselves—  
in ways that betray the love  
we are called to and commanded to have  
for one another,  
we open ourselves to being filled with darkness.

Those words in John's gospel—"And it was night"--  
those words move us deeper into the darkness of holy week,  
deeper into the darkness that can devour our souls,  
just as that darkness devoured Judas.

Darkness is as real as the light.  
Jesus knows that.

Jesus makes no effort to stop Judas.  
Jesus doesn't say to the 11 other disciples, "Grab him! Don't let Judas go."  
(Now that's what would happen in a good action film!)  
And certainly 11 men could stop one man.  
But that is not what happens here at supper with Jesus and his friends.

Jesus neither tries to protect himself  
nor does he try to protect Judas from himself.  
This is indeed a story of the free will we are given.

Jesus has emptied himself of all need for control.  
The only thing Jesus holds on to is love.  
*Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

Love is the only thing strong enough to overcome darkness.  
Love is the only thing.  
Love is the home run.  
Amen.