

## Jesus Calls Me a Friend!

"While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus replied, 'Friend, do what you came for.' Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him." Matthew 26:47-50

The story of Judas' betrayal is one we've heard many times. Because it is so familiar we may find it difficult to keep our minds from skimming over the details or wandering someplace else entirely. To guard against this, it's helpful to think about each word or phrase, letting us paint a picture in our minds, asking what these details of the story add to what we already know.

When going through this exercise, the word "friend" may jump out of Matthew's writing as a bit peculiar, given the story line. As we spend some time thinking about it, we realize a great invitation is conveyed in that one word.

Judas had been a member of Jesus' inner circle: a disciple, a missionary and a friend along with the other eleven. It wouldn't be unusual for Jesus to address him as a friend. But we know the rest of the story. We know the holy, sinless Son of God extended friendship to the man whom we now consider one of the most despised characters ever to be named in Scripture. When he did it, Jesus knew everything there was to know. He knew that Judas had betrayed him for thirty measly pieces of silver. He knew that the kiss he had just received from the betrayer's lips had delivered him into the hands of his tormentors. He knew all this and more. Yet he called him "friend"! In that last fleeting moment Jesus let him know that in spite of Judas' treachery and betrayal, Jesus would not betray his friend. That night in the Garden of Gethsemane the Savior's full gospel invitation was pressed into that one little word.

Our sins, along with those of Judas, were heaped on Jesus' shoulders that night, and stung his flesh with whip and nails. Jesus reaches out to you and me in the same way he extended the hand of friendship to Judas. We too are included in those pain-racked words "Father, forgive them!" (Luke 23:34) Jesus turns to us and calls each of us "Friend."

We've certainly done nothing to earn the honor and privileges associated with these words. If we examine our own sins, betrayals, and omissions, they may look much more like those of Judas than we care to admit. If we are honest with ourselves, we might even find ample reason to despair of all hope. But don't do it! Jesus implores us to repent of every sin, no matter how horrible, and he welcomes us back, no matter how far we've strayed. He wants each of us to be his friend!

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, we thank you for calling us your friends. We know you will never desert or betray us, even when this is what we deserve. We thank you for taking all of our sins on your shoulders and wiping the slate clean so we may look forward to eternity with you in heaven. We thank you for the blessing of forgiveness, which fills us with peace and encouragement as we repent of our sins. We thank you for helping us turn away from our sinful ways and helping us lead lives that reflect your grace. We thank you for sending us the Holy Spirit who has worked faith in our hearts, making these gifts ours. Amen.

This devotion was written by Marilyn Miller and reviewed by Prof. David Sellnow.