We have all experienced betrayal. Maybe it was at the hand of a close friend that turned on you, or maybe you have experienced a denial of justice or even at the hands of society a denial of opportunity because of race or social status.

The most famous betrayal happened over 2000 years ago, the murder of Julius Caesar. Reenacted in plays throughout the centuries, most notably by William Shakespeare, brilliantly captured by that poignant phrase: *Et tu, Brute?*

The worst kind of betrayal must be a betrayal of trust, where over time and intimacy you place all faith in someone who is not worthy of that trust. You have heard the pain is the words: He sleeps with my best friend; She lies about where the money went; He used my vulnerability against me.

But before there ever is a betrayal of trust, something equally sinister occurs, a betrayal of disengagement, when people we love or with whom we have a deep connection stop caring, stop paying attention, stop investing in the relationship. This is the cancer behind betrayal.

For God, this betrayal happened well before he ever sent his son to us. In chapter 20 of Luke we read a very telling parable in verses 9-18; the parable of the tenants. In this parable God is depicted as the vineyard owner and the tenants were his people Israel. He sends multiple servants (prophets) to collect rent on the property but the tenants beat them and then later kill them. The owner thinks I will send my son; my beloved son and they will listen to him. But the tenants responded by saying: “This is the heir, let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.” And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. A betrayal of disengagement followed by a betrayal of trust, yet God still sent his son to us knowing how he would be treated.

Our first Gospel reading today shows Christ coming into Jerusalem triumphantly! The people rejoice at his arrival shouting out “Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord!” But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people. In fact Jesus has already lamented at his coming to the city:

**Luke 13:34-35** “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’"

The people cry those very words at his arrival, but their hearts have long abandoned their care for the Lord. They long ago stopped paying attention, stopped investing. This was a clear betrayal of disengagement. Soon the people’s true nature revealed itself when they drafted up false charges of insurrection toward Rome and brought him before Pilate saying: “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.”

But Pilate did not find any justification for the charge and declared publicly three times that he was not guilty:
I find no basis for an accusation.
I have examined him in your presence and have not found him guilty.
I have found no ground for the sentence of Death.

Herod himself found no basis to accuse Jesus and even the Centurion at the cross proclaimed, “Certainly this man was innocent!” As if God were speaking out: “My son is innocent and is being sacrificed for the sins of others... bearing witness to the truth of Isaiah 53:4-6:

4 Surely he took up our pain
   and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
   stricken by him, and afflicted.
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
   he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
   and by his wounds we are healed.
6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
   each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
   the iniquity of us all.

The Nation of Israel betrayed him, the leaders could have protected him... they should have protected him. Here we have true betrayal – betrayal of God’s trust – betrayal of justice.

It is easy to Judge from our 2000 year old seats... even from here in this comfortable basilica... yet we too fail to protect the innocent... we too fail to protect the disenfranchised, the poor and the unwanted aliens in our midst. In Deuteronomy 10 we read: “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.” As if God cries out who will protect my immigrants, my tired, my poor, my huddled masses? And from us only comes silence, we have long ago stopped listening, we have stopped paying attention. We speak only of building walls. We speak of justice only to seek power.

In the conversation with God... from us only comes silence. We have stopped caring, stopped paying attention, and stopped investing.

Luke 13:34-35 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Christ’s passion was an incredible betrayal... the rapid and dramatic turning of the people in demanding his life... the denial of justice by Herod and Pilate, was all an incredible denial of trust.
It would have been just if Christ proclaimed that sin unpardonable – unforgivable! But Christ instead says:

Father forgive them for they know not what they do!

Forgive the unrepentant? Forgive the blasphemers? Forgive the murderers, the Tyrants, the slave masters of God’s people? Do we forgive those who did not even ask for forgiveness?

He could have said: “Father Consume Them!” and would have been justified in doing so. But now instead he prays for, makes intercession for the transgressors as was foretold in Isaiah 53:12:

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

And not just for the saints, or those who requested pardon, but also for the proud and the unrepentant!

Oh, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

- He was praised at his entry but treacherously the people turned on Him!
- Father forgive them!
- Pilate and Herod... Father forgive them!
- The soldiers and onlookers... Father forgive them!
- Prostitutes and Drunkards... Father forgive them!
- Tax collectors and tax payers... Father forgive them!
- Politicians and voters... Father forgive them!
- Active duty servicemembers and congregants... Father forgive them!

Not only for all of these but all who repent and believe in the gospel... and yes even the greatest sinners upon their repentance find mercy. What we have is truly an undeserved salvation.

That great thing which Christ died to purchase and secure is the forgiveness of sin, and on the cross we hear him cry out: Father forgive them! He died for our forgiveness and his blood cries out Father forgive them!

If Christ did not pray that intercession would not the wrath of God be poured out upon all mankind? But where is the condemnation? Where is the anger of the father waged against such injustice? Is it poured out upon the people? No, God instead poured it out on his only son and by his petition we are healed!

In that moment:

Love Overcame Hate
Love Overcame Judgment
Love overcame our Condemnation!

Truly we received an undeserved salvation! AMEN.