

Sermon 2008 Maundy Thursday
Text: John 13:21–30
Theme: Caught Red-Handed

There is a story about a woman who was working in a Honeybaked Ham store. The store was equipped with security cameras, and she was watching the small, black-and-white monitors when she saw a female customer come into the store, limp down the handicapped ramp, and go between two shelves. To the clerk's amazement, this customer on the camera grabbed a ham off the shelf and stuffed it up her dress. With the ham wedged between her thighs, the woman began to waddle toward the door.

The clerk, of course, was stunned and wondered what, exactly, she should do. Should she yell out? Should she follow the woman? Should she call the police?

Just then, the woman dropped the ham out from between her legs. It hit the metal handicapped ramp with a loud "clang" and then rolled down to the bottom of the ramp.

Without missing a beat, the shoplifter quickly turned her head and yelled out, “Who threw that ham at me? Who threw that ham at me?” And then she stormed out of the store in a huff.

When you’re caught red-handed, there aren’t many options open to you. You can stand firm and confess your crime, or you can sneak off into the night and stay on your sinful course pretending that what you are doing is okay or diverting blame toward someone else, or justifying your sin with some earthly reason.

In the Upper Room Jesus spent the last uninterrupted hours of his earthly life with his disciples. It was in this place that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, showed the meaning of true love and true service by taking on the role of a lowly servant and washing the feet of his disciples. There he predicted that he would be betrayed by one of his disciples and there he gazed at Peter and warned him that before dawn Peter would deny him three times.

All of this happened in the Upper Room. The part of that evening that I want to look at tonight, however, is Judas’s

moment of truth, for it is in the Upper Room that Judas is caught red-handed and has to decide what his next move is going to be.

His earlier meeting with Jesus' enemies went off without a hitch. Judas was smooth! Apparently the other disciples did not hear the exchange between Judas and Christ because John tells us in his Gospel that when Judas got up and walked away, the others had no idea of where he was going or what he was doing. They thought that he was going to buy what they needed for the feast, or that he was delivering money to the poor."

But Jesus knew what Judas was up to, and Judas knew that Jesus knew. So he was caught. He was caught red-handed, and now he had to decide what his next move was going to be.

How did Judas get to this moment in time? Did Judas's enthusiasm for Jesus gradually cool? Was he disappointed because Jesus failed to strike decisively at his enemies and the enemies of the Jewish nation? Did Judas, at the last, come to believe that Jesus was a false Messiah who should be done away with? Then again, maybe Judas was just a greedy and dishonest opportunist who couldn't resist a fast buck.

Whatever the case, whatever the motivation, Judas had carefully and quietly made his plans, and he had fooled them all! He had hoodwinked everyone.... Everyone, that is, except for Jesus.

Caught red-handed, Judas had the chance to come clean, to confess, to throw himself on the mercy of his Master, but he did not! Instead went off into the night to betray innocent blood, to stay the course, to refuse repentance. Judas got up and left, and in doing so he walked away from light and life and chose the path of darkness and death.

Likewise, it wasn't long after this that Jesus himself also got up and left for the Mount of Olives, and in doing so, he too walked away from light and life and chose the path of darkness and death. The difference between the two? While Judas did not have to go, Jesus did. Jesus had to willingly walk into the abyss so that you and I would not have to do likewise.

Judas got caught red-handed and disappeared into the night. After he betrayed Jesus, Judas was remorseful and tried to return the thirty pieces of silver he had received from the

religious leaders as payment for his crime. "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood," he said, and then in despair he went out and hanged himself. To the end, Judas did not believe that the Christ would suffer hell for him and pay for even his sin. He believed that Jesus neither would nor could forgive him. Judas believed that he was unforgivable! But nothing is further from the truth.

I think that there is a lot of Judas in all of us. We've all betrayed our Lord in thought, word, and deed, by the things we have done and by the things we have left undone. Week in and week out, Jesus catches us red-handed. He's always there, always watching. There is no hiding from Jesus. Should we stay put and confess our sins, or run off into the night like Judas trying to excuse ourselves and rationalize our sin, diverting blame anywhere and everywhere?

In *The Passion of the Christ*, as he makes his way to the place of his crucifixion and death, a beaten and bloody Jesus tells his distraught mother, "See, Mother, I'm making all things new!" This is exactly what he did. This is exactly what he still does for

all of us red-handed sinners who reach out to him in repentance and humility and plead for his forgiveness.

“Christ, have mercy!” we cry.

“Take, eat, the body of Christ given in death for the forgiveness of all of your sins. Take, drink the blood of Christ shed for you for the forgiveness of all of your sins.”

And all things are made new again. If only Judas had believed this. Amen.