Your Word is Truth

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. When you think of the greatest traitors in history, who comes to mind? Perhaps you think of Judas, the betrayer of Christ. Perhaps you think, et tu Brute? Maybe its even someone like Benedict Arnold. Perhaps one of the most underappreciated traitors in American history is a man by the name of James Wilkinson. Has anyone ever heard that name before? To be honest I had no idea who he was until I was on Facebook a couple of weeks ago and someone had an article referencing the worst traitor in American history. After reading about the guy a couple of things became clear. The first was that this man was very clumsy. While he was able to hide his nefarious behavior quite well, he wasn’t really able to accomplish anything through it. As a young man Wilkinson rose up the ranks quickly. By the year 1777 he was a brigadier general in the newly formed continental army. However shortly after this promotion, his large mouth got him on the wrong side of one of the commanders, as he had seemingly indicated that he was part of a plot to replace George Washington as commander in chief of the Continental Army. By March of 1778 he was forced to resign. After his resignation he became involved in the state government of Kentucky. He also became an agent for the crown of Spain. It seemed as though Spain wanted to extend it’s influence down the Mississippi River and having an agent as far north as Kentucky would certainly help that. However, despite this attempt, Wilkinson was never able to secure his foot hold in the social setting and eventually lost his influence. Yet at different times throughout his life he acted against the interests of the United States in order to make a few extra bucks. Benedict Arnold is one that we know of because his name has stood the test of time. He too was a very important character in our nation’s history. More so than James Wilkinson. That much is evident by the fact that his name is one that is familiar to us. I’m certain that there are other traitors from books, movies, and even real life that you can think of. After all, the idea of a traitor can add a wonderful tension and twist to the plot of a story. It can also break hearts. One of the most tragic things that comes out of totalitarian regimes are the stories of betrayal that come to light. Neighbors betraying neighbors, family members turning on one another, even children informing on their parents, all of these become common stories once life becomes an everyday fight for survival.

But what is it about the traitor that adds this tension? Let’s look at the story of Jesus. Judas is one of the best-known traitors throughout all of human history and literature. His treachery is one that we know, as we read through the story of Christ’s behavior on a yearly basis at least. His actions, and the actions of traitors in general, changed the outcome of events in a heartbeat. One moment Jesus is praying, he gets kissed and boom, he’s arrested. Perhaps it’s this element that makes us upset when a traitor achieves his goal. All of a sudden, the outcome that we were in favor of becomes much more difficult to achieve. We are a society that was built upon honor, and in a way, I think that is still true. Honor is something that is very important to us here in the U.S. but it has to be when it suits our needs. It seems that no matter what, one side or the other is always calling the honor of their opponents into question. It’s partially what has made politics such a toxic subject in our modern day. Every election seems more about destroying your opponent’s credibility rather than an honest exchange of ideas. And it has spilled over into our every day lives. It’s at this point that we as human beings start looking at each other as opponents rather than what we truly are, brothers and sisters. It is also a symptom of a society that does not know its roots. Today our reading comes from the High Priestly Prayer. It’s one of the times in which Jesus demonstrates for us the mode by which we should pray, and in this prayer, he lifts the believers in the world up before the Father in heaven, much as we do here when we say the prayer of the church. It seems as though even then the church was facing the similar problems that it is today. Jesus says, “**While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled…sanctify them in your truth.**” He says, “**I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one…Sanctify them in your truth.**” First Jesus mentions that the believers in him that are left behind on the earth, of which we are, are vulnerable. And how vulnerable we are. I started off today talking about traitors, so how many times have you filled that role? How many times have we spoken ill of someone behind their back, how many times have we let someone down, how many times have we simply been a disappointment to someone? That’s what traitors ultimately do, the disappoint. I know I have heard those words many times, and it’s often those words, “I’m not mad, I’m disappointed” that cut the deepest. Its because when you hear those words, the hurt and pain of your actions can be felt in those words. Our treachery becomes plain and exposed to the light of day. Jesus prays for the believers on earth because we are vulnerable. We are vulnerable to each other and to ourselves. We are vulnerable to the temptations of this world that would lead us to hurt one another. And we know that thus we are vulnerable to sin.

Our text for today is amazing because it shows us the breadth of God’s knowledge. Jesus knows humanity, perhaps better than anyone ever has. He was subject to the same temptations as everybody else. He had the same frailty that everybody else had. Yet he rejected sin. In this instance he doesn’t mention how messed up the world is and then call for it’s destruction. Instead Jesus asks the Father to look out for us. He says, “**…keep them from the evil one…Sanctify them in your truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake, I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.**” The word of God is not that which is broken. In this case I don’t mean word as in scriptures, but rather God’s promises. But then again, they are the same thing. God does not betray his word. We betray God all the time. We betray each other all the time. But God does not betray us. He tells us that where there are two or more gathered in his name there he is also, boom, it is done. He tells us that where there is repentance and confession there is the forgiveness of sins, boom, it is done. Our God tells us he will go to Calvary to give his life, and on the third day rise again, for us, and boom, it is done. With just a word, it is done. Our God not only keeps his word, but today we see that our God prays for us to be kept in his word. Our God prays, for us, for his people. Just as we pray for ourselves and for all people around the world. He prays that we would not go astray, that we would be protected. What a comfort it is to know that in a world of traitors, our God seeks our protection, like a wolf guarding the door. But that is what our God does for those he has called by name. That is what our God does for me and what he does for you. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.