

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Judas the Betrayer"
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Holy Wednesday

Every relationship can be seen from many different perspectives. This is certainly true of Judas in the gospel of John passages we have been reading this Holy Week. John devotes more time than the other Gospel writers to this disciple of Jesus who went astray.

John does so partly so that we might know the full extent of all that Jesus was going through to accomplish our salvation, the new relationship with God that we all need. We know something of the terrible torturing to death that the Cross represents. We know something of the injustice of the High Priest and the Roman authorities as they either accuse or allow Jesus to be sentenced to death, when he did no wrong.

But something we don't often reflect on in this week is how much and how painful the betrayal of one of the twelve might have been experienced by Jesus. We often see these things at a bird's eye view, and not close up and personal as Jesus himself must have experienced it. And remember that we have centuries of art history where Judas the Betrayer has the look of betrayal on his face. You can almost pick him out of any artist's portrayal of him. Yet in the Scriptures we do not find the eleven disciples ever questioning Judas' commitment to Jesus nor his responsible use of the money purse. It is only in John that we get this report about Judas. Even after Jesus more or less tells them that the one who dips in the bowl with him is the one who betrays him, they still don't get it. Dr. Tom Wright, whose commentary on John, entitled *John for Everyone* has helped me to understand a number of things about this passage. One was that the dipping the bread in the wine for another person was seen as a sign of special friendship, not the purpose that Jesus was using it for, that is, indicating Judas as the Betrayer. So there may have been some confusion, or that simply Judas was being sent on an errand to help the poor, which apparently he did often, or was thought to have done often.

So even though Jesus had told his disciples that one of them would betray him, nevertheless, they didn't seem to get what he was saying and also time was short and precious before his death, something Jesus was acutely aware of, which the disciples also seemed to not be able to digest. So here was

Jesus surrounded by his friends and closest companions. You have the young lad John, possibly not even twenty years old, reclining next to Jesus, and loving Jesus and receiving the love of the Lord. Now this reclining apparently was something done regularly and showed that you were a free person. Only slaves and servants would sit to eat or stand to eat. Reclining together was a posture of freedom in those days.

So Jesus had the depth of friendship, and the depth of betrayal side by side in these moments that we read about, both on Monday night and on Wednesday night. Many of us have experienced both of these relationships as well. We know friends who would care for us no matter what we have done, or could do. We have also known those who would hurt us and betray us, sometimes unwittingly, sometimes in a planned and devilish way. We need to see this part of our Lord's sacrifice for us. The darkness that Judas represented was not something that would snuff out the light of the Lord. Quite the contrary, Jesus' light would destroy all the darkness of Satan and his hellish companions.

What then can we say about why Judas did what he did? At this point, we enter the realm of speculation. We don't really know. But there are some hints in Scripture. On Monday, we read about Judas being reprimanded by the Lord for being more concerned for the money involved in the costly giving of Mary's gift. Let everyone here heed this warning: Do not find yourself on the side of those in church who grieve costly gifts and offerings to the work of God. Be careful and be reflective before you say, "We can't afford that here." Or, "We could use that money elsewhere." Judas' character was that his own greed and fraud were revealed through this exercise, and each of us must be more self-reflective as we approach the finances of the church and the world-wide mission of God in these days.

A year's wages is a significant amount of money, and we need to be wise in this area, but we also need to hear the call to be more generous. The extent to which we are generous with what we give whether it be while we are living or in our wills after our deaths, to this extent, we will benefit the work of God in our midst. Or as I often quote from another pastor, "You only get to keep what you give away," which I believe is an accurate statement of what Scripture says about stewardship.

Judas did not have this feeling, and John tells us why. And perhaps it was Jesus' public disagreement with Judas that was pushing him away from his

commitment to follow the Lord, and perhaps embittering him against the Lord. Many today bristle at the Lord's statement about the poor. We know the Scripture is full of encouragement to help and bless the poor, and thus please God. But here in this moment with only a few days left in the earthly ministry of Jesus, Judas' heart was once again in the wrong place. It is also possible that Judas was seeing that Jesus was not going to do the political thing that he and the rest of the disciples expected. Jesus was not going to kick out the Romans, was not going to lead another Maccabean rebellion (that time in the Inter-testamental period when the Jewish threw off their oppressors and re-established their kingdom for a while) and therefore Jesus was not the kind of Messiah that Judas expected. In short, Jesus was not fulfilling Judas' expectations. Judas was disappointed with Jesus, and perhaps even saw Jesus' work as a failure, because he didn't understand it.

So on another level, because we see Judas the Betrayer as such an evil figure, we need to ask the question: Was Judas all that different than you and I? I wonder. This is a time for soul searching, for me at least. Because I think the answer to the question is "probably not." There have been times where I have opposed the Lord's work in my life and other's. These times usually have not been conscious, but there have been many times when I have privately and publically against the Lord in a conscious way. Am I the only one here who has done that? Judas went the extra mile in going against Jesus. He would tell the religious leaders and consequently the Romans where to capture Jesus and when. Judas had enough with being publically admonished. Jesus had not lived up to his expectations. These are words that I heard many times over the years from church goers: God has not lived up to my expectations. Jesus has not come through for me, the way I expected him to do. Now many will not be so bold with their words, but this is the bottom line message they tell me, and also the reason why they have no time for church.

Is it hard for you and I to see the dark side of our spiritual lives? Is it hard for us to confess that we do sin, that we do rebel against the Lord, that we may even plan words and deeds that hurt the Lord, the Lord's work and the Lord's way? Part of maturing in our faith is certainly being able to own our faults, sins and brokenness, lest we see others or Judas as only all bad and ourselves as only good. Or more likely, we may see ourselves as all bad, to exercise what many psychologists call "self-hatred" and yet to not bring this honestly to God and others for help and healing. Many of us have suffered from this affliction.

And please remember it wasn't only Judas who betrayed the Lord in our Holy Week accounts. There was one another disciple who actively denied even knowing Jesus at the greatest time of his need. And that disciple's name was Peter. We all know the story of Peter not denying the Lord only one time, but three times. And this was even more poignant as Peter had the night before confessed that he would die before denying him.

Now we ask what is the difference between Peter's betrayal and Judas's. In terms of the sin, there is no difference. In terms of the choices made after the sin, there is a world of difference. Judas tried to make restitution with the chief priest and leaders by giving back the blood money. When they basically laughed at him, he decided he had no other choice but go out and kill himself. By the way, I don't believe this is ever anyone's only option. I believe there is a way of coming back to Jesus, just as Peter did. Even with wicked Judas, there was a way he chose not to take. And he had begun this choice a long time before, in his walk with Jesus, because he allowed whatever he was experiencing to get in the way of working out what was happening with the Lord. He could have confessed his stealing from the money bag and some of his other questionable activities. He could have gone to Jesus and confessed all that he was feeling and even his plan to betray the Lord. I believe he could have. But he chose differently, even as we sometimes choose against the Lord, the Lord's will and the Lord's way.

So the Scripture tells us it is not a question of whether we sin or not, all of us do. It is what we do once we sin. Do we go to the Lord in confession, honesty and transparency? Or do we go into hiding and into self-hatred, or other destructive patterns? We need to learn from Judas and Peter, and from Jesus himself. We need to find safe people to confess our sins to, that we might be healed, as James 5 says. If we don't, then the dark, hidden side of our spirituality, the fact of our sinfulness, our imperfections and brokenness can lead us away from the Lord, even ultimately denying Jesus, his church, and the faith. It is not uncommon today, I am sorry to say. Many would prefer that no one ever learns of their sins and weaknesses, before admitting such faults before other human beings. But it is only through the confession of our sins, that we can be healed. It is only through the acknowledgment of our weaknesses that we can know the redeeming strength of the Lord.

Judas is perhaps the slimiest character in the whole of Scripture, outside of Satan, the devil himself. But why is this? Probably because we know that

he knew better, because he experienced the Lord Jesus Christ personally and on a daily basis for probably about three years. How could he have betrayed such a one, who healed the sick, fed the poor, taught everyone faithfully, and even raised the dead? Judas had tasted of all the best things of God, yet went his own way instead. Let us be warned of the dangers of being a loner, of thinking we can fight all our battles without the love and care of other believers and the church as a whole. Let us be warned and let us receive the courage to express our weaknesses and sins to one another, before we find someone else in the media, or with the police, or some other place we would never expect to find a follower of Jesus Christ. Yet we know we are all broken and sinful.

Let us continue to make safe places in the church where people can be transparent, vulnerable and needy with one another, so that we can experience the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in this way, the love of God, and the friendship and fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray.