

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus (B)

Judas Iscariot

John 13. 21-30

April 10, 2020 (Good Friday)

When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me." 22 The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. 23 There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. 24 So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, "Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking." 25 He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" 26 Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. 27 After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." 28 Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. 29 For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor. 30 So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.

We've been looking at the Twelve Disciples... how Jesus Christ prayed for them (all night!) and then called them, selected them and over three years meticulously trained them.

Tonight we consider one disciple in particular, no doubt the most difficult one to ponder, Judas Iscariot.

Scripture is very hesitant to identify anyone in hell or to inform us of specific people who have been relegated/committed to hell. Of all the character it is Judas who comes closest to being identified as being there and even here it's only with these almost euphemistic words: "Judas who turned aside to go to his own place." (Acts 1.25) He went "to his own place" – it doesn't say hell – just "his own place". It's one of many terrible mysteries surrounding this man – history's most notorious villain.

I want to reflect on this twelfth disciple tonight and see both the terrible darkness in his story but also the terrible mercies it might provide us:

1. The Mysterious Wrongdoing of Judas

2. The Misguided Repentance of Judas (and a better way)

We wonder why Jesus Christ chose Judas. As early as John CH 6 we read, "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him." (John 6.64) Mystery.

And whatever we might say about that – about WHY Jesus chose Judas, it's also a mystery that the other disciples DID NOT KNOW either at the beginning or even right up to the end that HE WAS THE TRAITOR. All FOUR Gospels tell us that when Jesus Christ spoke of a betrayer, no one knew who it was ("Is it I?"). He'd been entrusted with the cash box (29) and used to steal a little for his own usage (12.6) but no one knew that until later. The point is: you don't make an obvious scoundrel the treasurer of your organization. If Judas showed signs of being evil or greedy or dishonest, WHY'D they give him the money? It was probably the opposite: he looked like he had a lot of integrity and no one suspected HIM.

Most scholars say he was the only non-Galilean. Maybe, he had something else to commend him. So, what MOTIVATED his wrongdoing? Why'd he do it? Well, we've mentioned theft/greed. And that's something. Most greedy people don't KNOW they're greedy – they lie to themselves (as we saw last week) and when you lie to yourself you get lost in all kinds of weird stuff (famous Dostoyevsky quote about the man who lies to himself – Brothers Karamazov). Judas DID get money for his betrayal... so greed was apparently a real factor.

If he was from outside Galilee maybe that sense of being the outsider was a motive, jealousy. And it does seem that when Mary of Bethany poured out that immense sum of money (Mark 14.5) in fragrance to anoint Jesus – it was a year's salary worth...it seems IT WAS THAT ACTION THAT PUSHED JUDAS OVER THE EDGE. Maybe he thought – “Ok! Enough is enough! This is plain fanaticism.” Maybe there was envy in those thoughts and motives...

AGAIN, I'm sure Judas was a complex person – he'd left everything behind to follow Jesus... He looked totally sincere and good (they gave him the money box!)...No doubt HE WAS SINCERE at least at the start.

Judas was complicated... but theologically... I mean reading the rest of the Scriptures and compiling all that God reveals about wrongdoing and sin and evil in the human heart – it's SAFE to say that the mysterious sin of Judas is, in at least ONE WAY... just like MY sin AND just like YOUR sin and just like any sin. All sin is rooted in unbelief.

You might remember we studied the Book of Numbers how there are seven rebellions in the book. They're recorded very deliberately in a literary device that puts ALL the emphasis on the middle element. In Numbers that middle (4th) rebellion is the refusal to enter the Promised Land and God diagnoses the reason they wouldn't enter in by a question God posits to Moses: “How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me”: (Numbers 14.11).

It's the central lesson of that centrally important book: sin is rooted in unbelief, an inability or unwillingness to believe or TRUST God. Why do YOU sin? Why do I sin? Why DID JUDAS COMMIT the most infamous act of evil ever executed in all of human history – a lot of mystery – but one thing we know: all sin is rooted in unbelief, an inability or unwillingness to believe or TRUST God.

After Judas committed this treachery, he later regretted it. It's not easy to put the accounts together but it appears that he tried to return the 30 pieces of silver to the priests (Matt 27.3-10). It says that Judas felt remorse and told the religious leaders, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood” but they offered him NO help and scorned him. And he threw the silver back at them and hanged himself.

It's sad and horribly tragic and hopeless... but it does raise the question: Is my repentance better than the repentance of Judas? I mean he called it “sin”. He felt remorse...he made amends/restitution. He doesn't seem to blame others or minimize what he did.

And I'm aware that there have been lots of times when my response to my own failing didn't rise to the level of this repentance... So, how is it misguided and what might it teach us about repentance? Is there any redemptive value in this sad story?

Well, first, the repentance of Judas for all that it DOES include is lacking in one CRUCially important element and that is the "CRUC" – the Cross is absent. Our own catechism defines repentance as including an "apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ." And as far as I can tell, Judas didn't see the loving, good, merciful character of God that was being acted out RIGHT THEN IN THE CRUCIFIXION of CHRIST – it was the CRUCIAL omission.

Right then Jesus Christ was going to the Cross to pay for crimes committed against the Kingdom of God – betrayals, denials, adulteries, refusals, rebellions, little white lies and momentary lapses of judgment AND deep, prolonged, premeditated acts of defiance in the face of the Holy, Holy, Holy God. He paid it all.

But Judas... for all his remorse and emotion and right words and returning the money... He apparently DID NOT BELIEVE THAT GOD'S FORGIVENESS IN CHRIST WAS REAL... he did not receive, take, accept, apprehend the mercy of God in Christ.

It's why we're here tonight. To consider that mercy, to see it executed and carried out by the terrible love of Jesus Christ. He loved us to death and He HATES when we don't see it. When we despair and run away and somehow try to atone for our own crimes but despair or by suicide as if that would please Him – but it won't. Even our death will not atone for our sins. ONLY the death of Jesus can do that.

That's why we're here: to consider it, to survey the wondrous Cross, reflect on it, soak in it, force ourselves to gaze upon it. To make sure we haven't missed the main thing – the mercy of God in Jesus Christ: "See from His head, His hands, His feet, sorrow and LOVE flow mingled down. "

There is mercy available for anyone. I do not doubt that there would have been mercy for Judas...if he had apprehended it... and not somehow become convinced that God was NOT good, was not merciful. Judas came to depend on himself (took matters into his own hands) rather than to depend on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Judas punished himself.

IF ONLY he had NOT hanged himself but instead gone to see Him who was hanging in place of everyone who puts matters into His hands ("Those hands"), the Man hanging on the tree, taking the curse for everyone who believes.

You cannot be sorry enough for the tiniest sin. If you think YOUR sincerity, remorse, despair, self-hatred and deep sorrow can atone for ONE WHITE LIE – you're wrong. BUT on the other hand, YOU and I must see that the worst sin... things you would DIE if others knew about you – the worst sins or treason and betrayal can be... CAN ONLY BE forgiven and erased by an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.

I'd rather be a bad person who trusts in Christ than be a good person who took matters into my own hands.

The Puritan Thomas Goodwin famously said, "Judas heard all of Christ's sermons." Don't miss the point of the sermons like Judas did. It will lead you into a remorse, regret and despair.

Apprehend the main point – get, receive, rest on, trust, take, accept the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.
Receive it once and every day, again and again – it'll turn your remorse, regret, despair into true
repentance and that will lead NOT to hopelessness but to JOY, to honesty and openness and to freedom.

True repentance leads NOT to death but to LIFE, LIFE, ETERNAL LIFE!