

“Judas”

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Matthew 26:14 – 27:66

In Matthew’s gospel, except for the story of the calling of the 12, there is no mention of Judas Iscariot by name until he goes to the chief priests to see what price he can get for betraying Jesus. Sometimes in the midst of a story, something happens in the plot and we think “should have seen that coming.” But if we weren’t conditioned by 2000 years of tradition, that wouldn’t be the case here at all.

Judas wasn’t the one rebellious disciple who was always giving Jesus trouble. We have no indication that Jesus or any of the others were suspicious of him in anyway. All that we really know of Judas is that he was one of the 12, and that he became an infamous traitor.

And so we are left to wonder why. Was Judas seduced by greed? Was there something that happened in those last days in Jerusalem that Judas just couldn’t accept? Or was Judas predestined for this? The recent discovery of the ‘Gospel of Judas’ suggests exactly this, and that Judas was in fact a hero. But large portions of that text are missing, and new scholarship has suggested many problems with the translation originally put forth for public viewing.

Matthew and the other gospel evangelists leave little doubt that Judas acted of his own free will, that he is an antagonist here.

Judas repents after Jesus is condemned- the tone, or at least how I heard it this time, is that he didn’t really expect this to be the outcome. As soon as he hears the verdict, he returns to the chief priests to give back the money, confessing as he does so that he has sinned against an innocent man. But his confession falls on uncaring ears, and Judas meets his now notorious end.

I’m not sure why I find myself drawn to Judas’ story this year. But maybe it’s the sheer absence of real motive that makes his case so intriguing. A lot happened during those last days in Jerusalem. Between the triumphal entry and the betrayal, Jesus’ confrontations with the authorities escalated, and life, which was never easy for the disciples, probably got even more difficult, more uncomfortable. Maybe Judas just wanted to get back to life the way it was before, and he thought that this was the most expedient way to do it. Jesus would be imprisoned for a little while, but would eventually return home to Nazareth, humiliated into silence and obscurity, but otherwise unharmed. And the 12, and most importantly Judas himself, could go back to what he was before, with a little extra money to help him get reestablished.

Maybe this is the point where I find sympathy with Judas. Life with Jesus can be difficult. It can put us in uncomfortable places, in opposition to the ruling authorities, in

places of ridicule with our friends or co-workers, or making sacrifices that we aren't naturally inclined to make.

How many of us have felt uncomfortable because we've been working with people or organizations that aren't governed by the compassion and justice of Christ? It puts us in the uncomfortable place of confrontation, or of guilt because we remained silent and did nothing.

How many of us have been teased, sometimes good naturedly, but sometimes in a mocking manner, about how much time we spend at Church?

And how many of us have thoughts like "I could really use that monthly pledge on a nice new flat screen television, or on a vacation. Or I could really use that extra time on Sunday morning to sleep, to golf, or to finish up that extra project at work or at home.

And sometimes there's nothing that we want more than to get back to safety and stability, to return to the comfortable life of living just for ourselves and for our family.

So while we will never find ourselves guilty of his betrayal, we might find ourselves in a similar state of mind as Judas, or any of the 12 who were anything but brave and loyal on that last night they were all together. We want to leave our faith, the Church, and even Jesus behind, because what we find there it is too difficult.

But what Judas forgot, and what we sometimes forget, is that although life with Jesus can be difficult and challenging, for every time we are uncomfortable because of the injustice of the world, we are witness of and to the justice and compassion of God. Just think of the good work that this community has done- as a Church and as individual parts of a whole. And not only that, but most of us find that when we offer our service, we are ministered to even more.

For every time that we doubt the purpose of the sacrifices we make, we are given gifts of fellowship and grace that we cannot put a price on. I have lost count of the number of stories I've heard of healing as a result of the prayer warriors, or grace as a result of our meal angels or lay Eucharistic visitors, or of love and welcome that is part of the spirit of hospitality here.

All of this is because of the love that Jesus has for us, and the life that we have in him.

And we should never forget, that even after Jesus reveals his betrayal, Judas is still at the table at the Last Supper. No matter where we are, what we have done, we are always invited to repent, and we are welcomed at the table. Because it is at the table that we find wholeness and acceptance. It is in the sacrifice of Jesus that we find forgiveness for our sins. It is at the altar where we meet the crucified and risen Jesus.