

Scripture Reading:

Luke 22: “1 Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover. 2 And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might kill [Jesus], for they feared the people. 3 Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. 4 So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. 5 And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. 6 So he promised and sought opportunity to betray [Jesus] to them in the absence of the multitude.”

''Judas Betrays His Lord''

Our journey through Luke’s Gospel brings us to the final days of the life of Jesus here on earth at just about the time that the Church celebrates this each year with Easter.

- **Jesus had come to save His people from their sins... And He would do so through His death; His burial; and the power of His resurrection!**
- **We certainly should and do celebrate this victory of Jesus each week, but we also remember, via the church calendar, that this took place in real history!**
- **This Good News, the Gospel is not a religious experience in our minds or a fairy tale... It is the hard stuff of history, like the signing for the Declaration of Independence or drafting of the Constitution that we as Americans are very familiar with!**

Imagine if someone tried to say it was not important that these events actually took place in American history or that we know the details...

- **It is the ideas or principles that are important, they might cry!**

With both Christian and American history, we also have folks who make revisions to the point where it means something completely different... But that is the subject for another sermon.

So this morning, we come to the betrayal of Judas...

- **Judas one of the most tragic figures in all of history**

His actions bring us to what we often see in the Scriptures: Grave warnings to those who do not take God’s covenantal promises seriously, BUT also an opportunity for us all to see the great comfort that we have in God’s promises to us as His sheep!

- **May we learn these lessons well!**

As I mentioned a few weeks ago, all of the Gospels seem to indicate that the public teaching of Jesus ended with the final pronouncement of woes to the religious leaders and the parables related in Matthew.

- **Luke reminds us in our text this morning that these religious leaders wanted to put an end to this Jesus, and that with the help of Satan himself, they would have a willing helpful with Judas Iscariot**

From a human standpoint we will see many “bad guys” who contributed to the suffering and execution of the Son of God!

- **Those Pharisees & Sadducees**
- **King Herod takes part**
- **The Roman Governor Pilate & the soldiers who beat Jesus**
- **Even some of the publicans & sinners – thief on the cross**
- **Certainly, Satan & his demons**

... And then we have Judas

Famous throughout all of history as the betrayer of Jesus

His very name used as a derogatory title in days past which is fading as the memory of Biblical truth fades in our culture.

BUT Judas is also unique as we consider all of these ‘bad’ guys...

- **All of those other players were clearly the enemies of Jesus, but Judas was one of his disciples!**

This is similar to what I believe we will have down through history... Many great enemies of the church who are easy to see:

- **Great heretics like Joseph Smith**
- **Men like Karl Barth who did all they could to destroy the church from within**
- **Political leaders like Stalin or Hitler who sought the end of Christianity**
- **Charles Darwin & his followers in science who reject God’s rule**

Revelation chapter 20 then tells us that near the end of this age, when all nations have been disciplined and all earthly rule has been placed under Christ, that then Satan will be loosed for a brief time and this will bring out many hypocrites like Judas who took refuge in the church, exposed as the wolves they really were... Their end will be swift as God destroys them, again just like Judas.

- **So, what must we learn from the life & betrayal of Judas Iscariot?**
- **First we must notice that when the Gospel accounts tell us about Judas, it is different for those who read the story than it was for those who lived the story!**

In ALL of the Gospel accounts we are introduced to Judas Iscariot as the bad apple: The betrayer of Jesus!

- **With Matthew & Mark Judas is the one ‘who also betrayed Him’, with Luke the one who ‘also became a traitor’**
- **John does not give us the list of twelve Disciples, but tells us that Jesus Himself said, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?”**
- **When Mary anoints Jesus for His burial at Bethany, it is again John who tells us that it was Judas who questioned those actions...
Not because he cared for the poor, but because he wanted more money he could steal in the money bag that he kept.**

So as we are reading this story we certainly see this betrayal coming!

Now Jesus did drop a pretty big hint with that comment about there being a devil in their midst, but we must remember that the disciples did NOT see this coming until after the fact... Like the movie with a surprise twist or ending, where only when we view it a second time do we see the OBVIOUS hints the director had given us all along the way. I mention this because it is an important part of the account of Judas that we need to understand if we are to be truly comforted as we see God carry out His great plan of salvation in our time.

- We need to step back and see things the way that the other disciples would have seen things:

When Jesus announces at the Last Supper that one of them is going to betray Him, the other disciples did not think it was Judas! They did not all cast a look his way and whisper to the disciple reclining next to them, "I just knew Judas was NOT really one of us!" Those 'shifty eyes' or 'the way he handled the money bag' might be things we would expect them to suspect, but remember WE were given all the hints, not them: Even when Jesus gave the early warning about a betrayer being in their midst He did not name Judas...

When Jesus told them the betrayer was right there at the table, they all wondered who it might be even asking if it might be them, not trusting the human heart, which is not a bad thing!

This is an important lesson we must all learn:

- From our human perspective, we cannot always see clearly what God is doing in history!
- Jesus had come to save His people from their sins, but the disciples did not see or know all the details about how that plan was going to be worked out
- The Church was then established as the Body of Christ which according to Paul in Ephesians chapter four will grow up to be a 'perfect man' in history so the Father can present this Bride to His Son upon His return in victory to defeat death, the final enemy
- And finally, we are told that as this takes place that the Kingdom of Jesus will fill the whole earth.

This is what Luke is presenting in his orderly account: Even the disciples, did not know all the details about how God would save His people

- God is now carrying out those final two steps...
We know the plan and the final end, but God has not given us all the details about how it will be worked out in history!

There are going to be many times that we are VERY surprised by how God does things...

Just like those disciples must have been when they realized later that one of the disciples who traveled in their midst for some three years, serving and ministering with them, was actually the instrument of betrayal that God would use in the end to deliver His Son to that cross at His appointed time to save His people from their sins!

This is the second point that we must understand if we are to be truly comforted today...

- God is in control and He knows what He is doing!

Now that sounds simple enough, but it is often one of the hardest concepts to remember when we see what is going on in our day to day living. In other words, it is easy to say and confirm intellectually that God is in control...

- But we are all often quick to falter when something tough or unexpected happens...

The loss of a young child always brings those questions of 'why did this happen.'

We hear of situations like the shooting we prayed about last week in our sister Church in Texas... A loving mother dying in the arms of her ten year old daughter from a bullet that likely came from the father. IF this does not break our hearts and cause us to wonder why, then we may still have hearts of stone... Remember even Jesus wept before the tomb of His friend Lazarus.

However, our 'why' should always be in the same spirit as Mary's 'how' when she was presented with something beyond her understanding

- In properly asking 'why' we are actually admitting our humble position as creatures.

Saying to God that we cannot begin to understand how He actually does work all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purposes!

We will certainly see this with the other disciples when we see how they approach replacing Judas in the first chapter of Acts.

- For this morning, we need to simply see and understand that the betrayal of Jesus by Judas did NOT catch God by surprise...

Matthew 26: "21 Now as they were eating, [Jesus] said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." 22 And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?" 23 He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. 24 The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." 25 Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Rabbi, is it I?" He said to him, "You have said it."

All things in God's plan are going forward just as had been planned including the betrayal of Judas. Remember, this does NOT make what Judas did a good thing...

- Jesus said it would have been better that he had never been born.
- Judas carried the weight of his sin both in the tragic end of his life and now for all eternity.

All of Judas' life was part of God's eternal plan: -- His ministry,-- His betrayal -- His tragic end

It is easy to see how those last two fit into God's plan, but we might not have fully considered or wondered about the first:

- Using the language of Jesus in John chapter 15: Judas was truly a branch that was cut out of the vine...

Judas is someone we must keep front and center, whenever we think about or discuss apostasy from the faith.

- Judas really was in the covenant!
- He was a circumcised Jew
- He was called to be a Disciple of Christ
- He was empowered by Jesus through the Spirit of God to serve as a disciple...

Jesus appointed twelve to be His disciples, including Judas Iscariot:

Mark 3:14 "Then [Jesus] appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, 15 and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons."

Shortly thereafter He sends these disciples out to minister:

Mark 6:7 “And [Jesus] called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. ... 12 So they went out and preached that people should repent. 13 And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them.”

- **Jesus did this knowing that one of the twelve would betray Him and knowing what this man’s end would be!**

I am sure many are saying at this point that all of this is not very comforting, but bear with me on this!

- **Yes, you could argue that from a human standpoint, that we could NEVER have assurance since even one of the very Disciples of Jesus could fall from grace!**

But consider two important things: First this does bring comfort when we encounter that tough situation where someone we were sure had their name written in the Lamb’s Book of Life turns away from the faith...

- **Reminding us that we do not ever truly know the heart of another Saint, but God does!**
- **Not only does God know, but He has a good reason for what has happened, even if it totally beyond our understanding in this life**

The second comfort comes from remembering that Judas knew as well!

- **Am I saying that Judas knew from the beginning that he would betray Jesus?**

No, but he was never a true sheep and thus he never really heard the Savior’s voice with the ears of faith:

- **He was identified by Jesus and the Gospel writers from the very beginning as a wolf in sheep’s clothing.**

Judas went the way of all sinners who follow their father the devil

Judas would have been proud of being a Disciple...

- **AH, but so were John & James asking to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus in His glory!**
- **The difference is that John & James humbled themselves under the rebukes of Jesus and learned to obey His voice -- Judas did not**

Some have argued, rightly, that Judas did not understand what was going on...

- **Certainly one could argue that all the other disciples were pretty messed up at times as well**
- **Again, the sheep in God’s Kingdom are not perfect nor the smartest but they do hear the Savior’s voice, coming under conviction when they are wrong and continuing to grow in grace.**

Even when we come to the betrayal of Judas, we can wonder about the other disciples...

- **Did they not desert Jesus in the Garden? Did not Peter deny Jesus three times that very night?**
- **Again, with the eleven sheep we see them broken by their sin with the best example being Thomas who cried My Lord and My God, to say nothing of the repentance that Peter must have shown in his private meeting with Jesus!**

On the other hand, Judas, even when he saw the outcome of his wicked actions, continued to harden his heart and ultimately killed himself in the field of blood rather than repent

- **Once again we have the picture given to us in the Old Testament in the lives of Kings Samuel and David.**

When Samuel was confronted by his sins he was always full of excuses and took things more and more into his own hands, spending his final hours at the last supper of the damned with the witch of En dor.

King David on the other hand also committed many sins: But he was always broken when confronted with those sins, confessing them as we see in Psalm 51 and ending his life knowing that he walked before God as a righteous man, thanks to the grace of God and the work of Jesus.

So for us to have real comfort:

- **We must remember that the lessons from the lives of Samuel and Judas are real warnings!**
- **But we must also remember that King David and the eleven faithful disciples also knew that they were sheep who heard the shepherds voice, despite all their sins and shortcomings.**

In others words, they knew their true standing before God and so should we!

- **Judas knew that he did not want to give up his pride and desire for control**
- **Judas knew that stealing from the money bag was wrong, but continued in that sin until the end... Opening himself up to the temptation to take the 30 pieces of silver!**
- **Judas knew that Satan had taken control of his life and even when he saw the results, refused to cry out to Jesus for forgiveness**
- **Judas sought to keep things under HIS control until his final act of taking his own life!**

However, we whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life also know!

- **Jesus said that His sheep will HEAR His voice...**
- **Jesus did not say His sheep would be perfect or never be tempted to act like wolves...**

He said they would hear His voice, even when it is a voice of strong rebuke like the Prophet Nathan who told King David "YOU are the man"

- **We as sheep have the confidence to claim Paul's promise to the Saints in Rome, "1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."**

Will we sometimes be haunted by our conscience or even Satan whispering to us, "But you might just be another Judas."

We would not be fallen creatures living in a fallen world if that did not happen at times

So yes, there may be doubts, and we should cry with the father who brought his demon possessed son to Jesus, "I believe, help Thou my unbelief"

This is why our Covenant Renewal Worship is so important week after week, reminding us of God's love as He forgives our sins, strengthening our faith through Word and Sacraments and prepares us for another week of service.

- **Coming week after week as the joyful sheep who hear the shepherds voice.**

Our hymn of response this morning is one that rightly comes in the week that we remember Saint Patrick of Ireland, but also as one that can remind us how to remove those doubts that our flesh, the world and the devil want to fill our minds with...

St. Patrick lived in a pretty tough time, with pagan rituals, sexual immorality and general debauchery...

Much like our modern world!

Patrick knew that he and the other Saints could not stand in their own strength, hoping they were saved.

He knew that salvation was in Christ and Christ alone, so he wrote a powerful hymn to strengthen himself and the other Saints. It has not only come down to us through the centuries, but still has a message that will guard and keep us as sheep in the midst of wolves...

We too must bind ourselves to the strong name of the Trinity

As sheep who hear the shepherds voice we should seek to bind ourselves to Him, in His incarnation, His baptism, His death on the cross, His bursting forth from the spiced tomb, His riding up the heavenly way and His coming at the day of doom.

Is your heart willing to bind your life to Jesus each day?

- **Then you are a child of God who has heard the Father's voice. His desire & His will is that you stay close to His Son Jesus!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 23:

A precious Psalm of David...

"1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever."