

2018 03 18

Parish Communion

Luke 22

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, ²and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. ³Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. ⁴And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. ⁵They were delighted and agreed to give him money. ⁶He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

The Last Supper

⁷Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

⁹"Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

¹⁰He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, ¹¹and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹²He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there."

¹³They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

There are some names which we have all heard of, but which are never now used for children because of their association with one evil person; Adolf, Jezebel, Herod, Genghis and Judas leap to mind.

Judas became synonymous with betrayal, and remains so to this day, all the online dictionaries say so, even the internet urban dictionary says so, (so it must be true!)

Here's an odd thing I found researching on the internet: Discrimination against redheads may be Judas's fault...

bear with me...in mediaeval paintings Judas is often depicted as having ginger hair or beard, presumably to distinguish him from the other disciples and from Jesus.

Elizabethan dramatists including Shakespeare reference this, and this association with Judas can only have increased historic discrimination against gingers.

[See (*if you really must*) 'Judas's Red Hair' Paull Franklin Baum

The Journal of English and Germanic Philology Vol. 21, No. 3 (Jul., 1922), pp. 520-529]

In Dante's inferno Judas is the worst sinner, condemned to be eternally bitten and chewed by Satan.

In 1965 Bob Dylan was called Judas for trading in his acoustic guitar for an electric one.

Footballer Sol Campbell's was known as "Judas" by Spurs fans for years following a controversial transfer from Tottenham Hotspur to Arsenal

Even Lady Gaga sang a song name-checking Judas in 2011

So the name Judas lives on.

What do we know about Judas Iscariot from the bible?

He was chosen by Jesus as one of his closest 12 followers.

He betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver
And he committed suicide.

That's about it.

Jesus Iscariot could identify where he was born, or his radical politics.

Judas Iscariot= 'Is Qeriot' of Qeriot a rich-establishment town in Judea.

Or it could mean 'of the Sicarii', one of a band of Jews who resisted Roman rule by assassinations of important Romans. They carried a short easily concealed dagger (called a Sicae) to murder random Romans often in the marketplace, an effective form of terrorism.

All four of the gospels refer to Judas betraying Jesus, so even the most liberal of bible scholars believe this refers to a real incident- on the 'principle of embarrassment', that is the early church wouldn't have made up an incident so embarrassing as one of Jesus closest friends turning on him.

We don't know much about Judas, he is just one of the disciples for most of the story, learning from Jesus, joining in all the events, ministering alongside the others, he doesn't stand out.

So why did Judas go to the Jewish authorities to betray Jesus?

John reports that Judas stole money from the common purse. So money may have been a motive.

Or Judas may have wanted to bring events to a head, to force Jesus to declare himself as Messiah and show his glory and his power, and throw out the occupying Romans.

The gospels of Luke and John both state that Judas betrays Jesus because "Satan enters into him", suggesting that Judas may not have been acting of his own free will (Luke 22:3-6; John 13:27).

Whatever Judas motivation the bible and church tradition present him as a betrayer and see him, along with the Jews and Roman authorities as the cause of Christ's crucifixion. Judas has been seen as the archetypal Jew (money loving, corrupt, betraying) which has unfortunately fed into anti-Semitism.

In 1978 a gnostic "gospel of Judas" was discovered, published In 2006. This dates to the second century, and depicts Judas as a close confidant of Jesus, according to this portrayal Judas was the only one to really get Jesus message. The picture of Jesus is very much at odds with the gospel picture of him, and explains why this text wasn't included in the Christian bible.

Perhaps as a reaction to the holocaust, and to the "Gospel of Judas" more recently Scholars have asked another question; Could it be that Judas was actually doing what Jesus wanted and needed him to do, even perhaps acting with Jesus agreement to trigger the confrontation with the Jewish and Roman authorities which lead to the cross and ultimately our salvation?

The biblical evidence for this hangs on two phrases.

In Matthew's gospel, in the garden of Gethsemane, after Judas has identified Jesus with a kiss, Jesus says to Judas "My friend, do what you are here for" (26:50). And in John's account of the Last Supper, Jesus identifies Judas as the one who will betray him, and tells him: "What you are going to do, do quickly"(13:28)
Jesus certainly doesn't tell Judas to stop.

Judas's betrayal is reported in all the gospels and in Acts, as an essential part of God's plan (see John 13:18, John 17:12, Matthew 26:23-25, Luke 22:21-22, Matt 27:9-10, Acts 1:16, Acts 1:20).

We all have the capacity to fail others, to betray them
This leads on to guilt and self-hatred
And in Judas case sufficient distress and despair to lead to suicide,

³When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴“I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

⁵So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. (Matthew 27: 3-5)

The Jews then use the money to buy the potters field as a burial place for non-jews. An alternative picture is given by Peter in Acts 1:18 of Judas buying the potters field himself and him falling and his body bursting open.

Either way, Judas realizes Jesus is going to be judicially executed, and feels guilt and remorse leading to his death, however it happens.

Guilt is complicated.

I find it helps to think in terms of four forms of guilt. Depending on whether you have actually done wrong and whether you feel guilty.

There is true guilt, as felt by Judas, where you have done something wrong and feel bad about it.

But there is also legal guilt where you have done something against the law but don’t feel any guilt, for example in civil disobedience, standing up against a corrupt state may well require breaking the law.
Or as I experienced a few days ago in Germany, I completely accidentally underpaid for a train journey, believing that was correct. I was approached by the ticket inspector and handed my ticket over with a

big smile, and absolutely no expectation of a problem. I was then made to pay a 60 euro fine. I felt embarrassed and ashamed at my mistake, but no sense of guilt since I didn’t intend to cheat the system.

Then there are people with psychopathic personality traits who do things ordinary society would judge as wrong but who feel no guilt whatsoever. The psychopath can lie, cheat and pass someone else’s work off as their own; or at a more extreme level steal, rape and murder and not feel any guilt or remorse at all. Thankfully psychopaths are rare.

Finally there is false guilt, a feeling of guilt where there is no wrong-doing. I see this sometimes in my day job as a psychiatrist, particularly with people experiencing severe depression. The paralyzing guilt of not living up to their own high standards blights lives, and at the most extreme, in psychotic depression, I have had patients who believed that they were responsible for all the evil in the world and hence deserved to die.

Judas guilt was real, he had betrayed Christ, he couldn’t live with the shame and regret and so killed himself.

I don’t think Judas story has anything to say about those who commit suicide whilst in the grip of a mental illness, which is the large majority of such deaths. His is the action of the shamed traitor, the cornered double agent, one who cannot face the consequences of his actions.

There is a parallel with the experience of Peter;

All of the remaining 11 disciples abandon Jesus, they all run away, although the women followers of Jesus remain at the cross.

Peter doesn’t run too far, he watches at a distance, warming himself by a campfire, but when he is challenged that he is a follower of Christ he denies it on three separate occasions. (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, John 18)

As the rooster crows Jesus meets his gaze, Peter repents, and begins to weep. Later John's gospel describes how Peter encounters the risen Christ, is questioned "Do you love me." three times, to balance the three-time denial, and is then forgiven and restored to relationship with Jesus. (John 21)

All of us can experience betrayal, a spouse's infidelity, an old friend lying about us, even sudden illness where our body lets us down can feel like a betrayal.

All of us are capable of betrayal, of letting others down, of denying the truth about our selves, our lives and relationships.

If we have let others down, Simon Peter is the model we need to follow rather than Judas. Both felt guilt and despair, Judas dies, but Peter repents, that is he turns back to Christ and is painfully made to face his betrayal honestly and is then forgiven and restored.

Forgiveness is central to Jesus message, he entered human history to set us right with God, to bring forgiveness to those who repent, to make it possible for each of us to return to right relationship with God. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

If we have been betrayed and we hold onto our anger and hurt we only damage ourselves. It takes time, but God can help us to reach a point where we can forgive those who have harmed us.

The one who has harmed us may never ask for forgiveness, may never admit having done any wrong, they may remain angry and hostile and rejecting; but we can still choose to forgive them.

It can take years, but choosing to let go of the hurt and pain, choosing to give up on vengeance and anger is the only way to eventual healing.

This is not to deny reality, not to pretend that nothing terrible happened, not to suggest that the one who betrayed us gets away without consequences, there may still be a necessary legal process going on, but we choose, in God's strength, to forgive so that the pain that the perpetrator caused and is causing us can finally heal. So you are no longer carrying them around all the time.

No one has the right to tell you when it is time to forgive, for humans forgiving is often a process rather than a single event. God will, at the right time, give you strength to forgive and move on with life.

If you have betrayed someone let down your barriers, admit how much you have harmed them, admit it to yourself, To God And to them and as much as it is in your power to do so, set it right, make recompense, then seek God and that individuals forgiveness.

If you need to forgive someone today, Or if you are carrying a burden of guilt around and would like to have someone support you in bringing this to God and accepting forgiveness, the prayer ministry team is available after the service, Or any of the clergy would be happy to meet with you, hear your confession, discuss any steps needed to make recompense, and then assure you of God's forgiveness.

Our God is the God of second chances, and third and fourth chances.

Our God is full of forgiveness, and compassionate love.

You don't have to carry around the unhealed wound of having been betrayed, you don't have to carry the burden of having betrayed another

Because of Jesus death on the cross
forgiveness is freely available.

Don't despair like Judas, be like Peter
turn back to Jesus,
meet his gaze,

acknowledge and experience the pain of
your guilt and failure,
and then accept his forgiveness and be
reconciled to our loving God.