

March 30, 2014 “One of the Twelve” Matthew 26:14-16

In Matthew’s account three little verses tell us what Judas did. He sold Jesus into the hands of his enemies. From everything we are told in the combination of the gospel accounts Judas was the treasurer of the mission team. He handled the money. He was not only apparently good at that task, we may assume he was astute. Judas may have been the only one of the twelve, or for that matter the hundred and twenty to have figured out that Jesus is not about casting the Romans out of Judea, restoring the throne of David as an earthly power base and therefore needing a minister of finance. Like some of the officers in the war between the States, he has figured out that there is only one way this ministry of Jesus, given what Jesus has said about his intentions...there is only one way it can end. Judas has decided to make the most of his situation.

For some that makes Judas the villain, the traitor. If the gospel accounts were biographies and only about a man named Jesus, a prophet with an extraordinary intellect, and an ability to heal some people it would be reasonable to think of Jesus as the traitor. But once again that is not in fact what we have before us. The gospels are the summary of the experience of the authors of the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. They are about the fact that Jesus is from beginning to

end, more than an ordinary man. He is the Son of the living God. He is the Messiah foretold in the law and the prophets. And thus He alone is the Saviour of the world. And He does not save us from evil. He does not save us from conflict. He does not save us from injustice. He saves us from our sin and our sinfulness....which may mean there is less evil about, less conflict, less injustice. But never lose sight it is sin from which Jesus saves you and me.

So it should not come as a surprise that Matthew would think it important to make the point as plainly and clearly as he can, that Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve. He was part of that inner circle of that was always with Jesus. Always within reach. Some of Jesus teaching was just for them, because they were all being prepared for a time when the Jesus movement would need leadership in the physical absence of Jesus Himself. Some of Jesus teaching was especially for them. Into their hands the gatherings would be handed....when all is said and done that is all the word church means....a gathering. A gathering that comes together to worship. A gathering that comes together to minister to others. A gathering that is called by no one less than the living God, to touch lives with God's love and power and thereby to draw them into an ever growing circle. "One of the twelve....the one called Judas Iscariot."

In other words he was part of everything to which the twelve were party. He had seen the lepers cleansed. He was there when only one of ten of them returned to say thank you! He was there when the 5000 were fed when the disciples had not bought groceries to do so. He was there when Jesus fed the 4000...in other words it was not a one time event that people could explain away. Over and over again Judas saw Jesus heal blind men. He saw Jesus heal deaf men. Crippled men. Paralyzed men. He saw beggars return to normal living. Work and commerce. He saw the woman with the problem of bleeding healed by just reaching out from behind in the crowd and touching Jesus. Saw her convicted, simply because Jesus asked "who touched me?" when someone and perhaps several said, "we are in a crowd...how would one tell." He was with them at the well when the woman got excited and began looking for her people and friends to tell them, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did?" Not an entirely accurate story. What Jesus did was in a few comments He convinced her she had not secrets in His presence. That Jesus knew her as God knew her. A naked soul. And she was impressed....convinc ed He was Messiah. It's all there in the phrase "then one of the twelve". He has been witness to everything that happened in the three years of Jesus ministry.

Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and asked, "what are you willing to give me if I hand Him over to you?"

And Judas took the 30 pieces of silver they offered. I am going to say it again. I do not see Judas as the villain in this piece. In Luke's second great document, the book of Acts, full title, The Acts of the Apostles, Luke tells us Peter said this of Judas Iscariot. "The Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago, through the mouth of David, concerning Judas who served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus....he was one of our number and shared in this ministry." As a result Peter was convinced that Judas Iscariot's place needed to be filled and so by vote they elected Matthias to once again make the number twelve.

I see Judas as a tragic figure. A sinner like the rest of us, but also a tragic figure. I find myself asking this question. What is the difference between Judas' act of betrayal and Peter's acts of denial. Remember that Peter said "I never knew the man." He was talking about Jesus. And before the rooster crowed to sound the arrival of first light, he said it twice. What is the difference. And I will tell you the difference. Peter repented of his sin. Whereas Judas saw its saw the magnitude of his sin, and took his own life....never able to see the risen Christ as Peter did? Never therefore to have the opportunity for the forgiveness Peter received. "Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man" and whose story ends that way!

Here is the real point. Jesus testified over and over again, that He was here as a man on Earth, to be about His Heavenly Father's business. The crucifixion and resurrection, the twin center piece at which all of the gospel accounts reach their climax are about God's plan to redeem us from our sin. For God so loved the world than anyone who believes in Him, that is God revealed in Christ, shall not perish but have eternal life. If that is what the gospel means, there can be no single villain who makes the crucifixion occur other. Either this is God's story or it is not. The Christian stance is the stance taken by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and reflected in the letters of the disciples to the infant church, and the Revelation to John with its conclusion as to how History as we understand it will conclude. As the Chorus puts it..."Our God Reigns". As the hymn says, "Jesus shall reign where're the Sun does his successive journeys run." And yet another hymn..."In all life thou livest, the true life of all/ we blossom and flourish, like leaves on the tree/ and wither and perish, but (nothing) nought changes thee!"

"So they counted out for Judas thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over." Here is the problem. We must balance that verse Scripture with this another. Pontius Pilate said to Jesus, frustrated by his inability to either get answers from Him or to make sense of the answers he received..."Don't you realize I

have power to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus did reply. He said, “You would have no power over me, if it were not given to you from above.” It is after all not Judas story or Pilate’s or even yours or mine. It is God’s story. And it is so much more important that we believe...than that we ever understand every word of it, or detail. And that too is something at which our minds rebel. We want to understand. In fact we are tempted to believe that if we understand sufficiently we will in some measure control our own destinies. And there too lies the way of falsehood. We do not so much control as we believe we control. Control is the great illusion our sin creates in us.

There is no arguing against the truth that Judas played a part in the unfolding plan of God for saving us from sin. The inclusion of this message in the series leading up to Easter this year is that this point be made. Judas is not instrumental in the occurrence of the crucifixion. He played a part. His sin was a part of the story, as is yours and mine. For only if we were not sinners, and Peter and Judas too, only then would there have been no need for the shed blood of the lamb of God.

And that leads to this. Because we are sinners. Because we are inconsistent in our faithfulness. Because the most righteous man of his time....Noah was nonetheless a sinner, God gave His only Son, the sacrificial lamb whose blood

would save us. Our response is acceptance, faith, being no man's judge....for that role also belongs not to us but to God.

Let us pray;

Lord forgive us our sinfulness. At times we judge Judas, and others as though they were the cause of the cross and the open tomb. Help us to acknowledge what they did, but also help us to acknowledge what we have done, our sin. Help us to confess and to mean that we are the reason your son suffered and died, that your love is such that you did not want us to perish. Help us to submit to the wonderful reality of the greatness of your love for us. Amen