

Sermon for Ash Wednesday

Date: March 6, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 59:12-20

Epistle Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2

Gospel Reading: Luke 22:1-6

Sermon Text: Luke 22:1-6

Sermon Title: Judas: Betrayer and Opportunist



Hymns:

LSB 440 – Jesus, I Will Ponder Now

LSB 419 – Savior When in Dust to Thee (v.1,4)

LSB 430 – My Song Is Love Unknown (v. 1,2,4,7)

Called to Remember (*Tune 637*)

LSB 422 – On My Heart Imprint Your Image

LSB 433 – Glory Be to Jesus

Distribution:

LSB 741 – Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense

Imposition:

LSB 608 – Lord, to You I Make Confession

LSB 609 – Jesus Sinners Doth Receive



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Text: Luke 22:1-6

The Festival of Unleavened Bread was near. The chief priests and the experts in Moses' Teachings were looking for some way to kill Jesus. However, they were afraid of the people.

Then Satan entered Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles. He went to the chief priests and the Temple guards and discussed with them how he could betray Jesus. They were pleased and agreed to give him some money. So Judas promised to do it. He kept looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus to them when there was no crowd.

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Grace, peace and mercy to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Judas has often been called the betrayer, but today I want you to see him as more of an opportunist. He's a man who was always looking for the easy way. He wanted everything, but was seldom willing to work to get it. He wanted the short quick path to success. When he joined with Jesus and the other disciples he most probably saw an opportunity to be in on the foundation of something really big. This was his ticket to the top, and he saw himself as savvy enough to see the potential and he took hold of it. The fame and fortune he believed he deserved would finally be his.

You see the Temple Authority of that time was teaching that the Messiah was going to be an earthly ruler. Someone who would, if he came soon, send Rome back from whence they came. That is the Messiah for whom Judas was looking. Not the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. Not the Messiah who would suffer, serve and die. Judas saw glory for himself in Jesus.

When the miracles really started, and the crowds of people grew, and the steady followers increased, Judas saw dollar signs and position for himself. He knew he was on the right track. He knew he had a bright future. His train had finally come in. It was now only a matter of time.

You've got to wonder... Jesus, the Author of Life and the Perfecter of Faith, the very Son of God, must have known. Jesus must have seen in Judas a man who would do anything to satisfy his own selfish ambitions. We are prone to ask why Jesus would take this political opportunist and potential traitor into His confidence, and include him among the closest follower, the inner circle of twelve men. Certainly He knew what Judas was and what he would become.

Surely He did know. When we ask these questions we need to keep in mind two things:

- 1) The remarkable love and mercy of our Savior. Jesus came to cure the sick and save the lost. Judas was sick with the sin of greed, and lost to the truths and promises of the Father. Judas needed Jesus, even if he didn't see that in himself.
- 2) We also need to keep in mind Scripture had to be fulfilled. The Old Testament predicted the traitor.¹ It was told hundreds of years earlier that a close friend, who ate with Him, would betray the Messiah.

Now Judas was not the only disciple to misunderstand Jesus' reason and purpose, at the start. How did Judas fall so far? Ambition is the answer. Ambition had Judas' heart in its grip. Judas was looking for position and power. You can imagine how Judas must have felt. He thought Jesus was getting ready to set up His earthly kingdom, but step-by-step he saw his ambitions disappointed by Jesus.

When John the Baptist was executed Jesus did not look for a way to take revenge or incite the crowds against king Herod. Instead He withdraw from the crowds for a time.² When a large group of people rose up to try to make Jesus their bread king, again Jesus withdrew.³ When the Pharisees challenged Jesus in public to prove His authority and power, Jesus didn't show them

1 Psalm 41:9

2 Matthew 14:10-13

3 John 6:1-15

what He could really do.⁴ Jesus just would not capitalize on any opportunity that crossed His path. Judas was frustrated. Jesus wouldn't take action. He wasn't working fast enough. He wasn't doing the right things. Judas knew what needed to be done and Jesus wasn't doing it.

In fact Jesus started talking about humility, shame and death. Jesus emphasized more and more the moral and spiritual aspects of His kingdom. Near the end more and more of Jesus' followers began to abandon Him.⁵

Judas watched all of this with ever growing dismay and disillusionment. He probably never got to the point where he hated Jesus, but he probably did see Jesus as being deluded, impotent, and incompetent. Too much of a dreamer looking for something Judas knew could never exist. The real irony here is that it could have. The Utopia that Jesus was preparing all of us for is Heaven. An eternal peace that Judas will, because of his ambition, never know.⁶

Because of that ambition, Judas' spiritual life quickly deteriorated. He was balancing on the edge of a precipice, and the rapture of the deep was pulling him down. He tried to hold on to something that would anchor him down, but having let go of Jesus, and refusing to listen to Jesus' teachings, the only anchor he could grasp was the one that pulled him down to depths from which he would never rise. He fell, and as he fell, Satan entered his heart.⁷

Judas wanted profit. He wanted to make his own way, make his own wealth. At first he was content stealing from the little money the group received to help the poor,⁸ but soon that was not enough. Satan whispered an idea in his ear, and Judas, no longer listening to the Master, heard that sly voice. Judas went to the Temple Authority and offered to deliver Jesus to them... for a price.

The leaders were worldly men. Many of them were in fact political appointees, not faithful priests. They saw the lust for money in his eyes. They recognized it because they shared Judas' love for power and money. Judas could have haggled for more but they knew they had him. They offered the price of a dead slave, 30 pieces of silver.⁹ Judas accepted their small insulting offer.

As you know Judas never enjoyed that money. Satan loves to destroy and see God's children suffer. When the deed was done, and Jesus was arrested, beaten and sentenced to death, Satan let Judas' conscience see what he had done. Judas, now bearing under the great weight of knowing what he had allowed his greed, and lust for power, to do plummeted in guilt and shame. Desperate to undo the destruction he had caused he tried to return the money.¹⁰ He tried to convince the authority that Jesus was innocent.¹¹ The one thing he did not do was look to Jesus.

Jesus never left Judas. Jesus never denounced him, never abandoned him. Had Judas simply apologized to Jesus, Jesus could have, would have, told him, "Judas all things needed to be

4 Matthew 16:1-4

5 John 6:66-67

6 Acts 1:24-25

7 Luke 22:3

8 Luke 7:36-50

9 Exodus 21:32

10 Matthew 27:5

11 Matthew 27:4

fulfilled. Fear not, you are forgiven.” Judas never heard those words because he never listened to what Jesus was really teaching. His ears were closed to Jesus the Prince of peace, because his eyes were focused on a piece of silver that only at the end Judas realized could not save him.

In the despair of guilt that racked his mind, Judas fell. Hell had claimed him. By not looking to Jesus, who could have and would have, forgiven him even after all he had done, Judas saw no escape. Even before the final verdict was pronounced on Jesus, Judas fell to the end of a rope, and fell into the abyss of Hell, from which he would never escape.¹² Hell had claimed him.

Perhaps the most terrible irony of Judas’ life is that he wanted everything. He wanted a comfortable life, filled with riches he could not imagine. Jesus was offering him just that but Judas could not see it. He wanted it now. Jesus was giving it to him later, but forever. Judas wanted fame. He could have been one of the twelve that went out into the whole world to spread that Good News. Instead his fame is one of disdain and contempt.

As we look back we see the tragic irony of Judas’ case. We see Jesus offered everything Judas wanted, but Judas could not see it. Judas wanted fame, social approval, and prestige. Jesus offered him lasting fame as one of the Twelve, the friendship of the angels, the love of God. Judas wanted a position worthy of his talents. Jesus offered to make him a child of God and a steward of the mysteries. Judas wanted security and wealth. Jesus offered him eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, and the riches of Heaven.

What lesson can we learn from Judas’ life? How can we ensure that we do not make the same mistakes? Haven’t you too had your moments when you were where Judas stood? Haven’t you been on the edge of disaster with a storm blowing you over the cliffs of destruction? Our personal goals and desires can trip us up, and sweep us away from Jesus, but His voice calls us back. Jesus beckons us back to Him. You should look at your own life and find those times when you were so close, so close to wandering away from all that Jesus offers you.

Even now we are not immune to the disease of, “I want it now.” We are, by nature, sinful and fixated on what we can get here, rather than what has been promised there. Health, prosperity, prestige and power call to us endlessly. Enticing us to just take one step. One step away from our Lord. ...and then just one step, one step away from our Lord. ...until it has lured us away from all that Jesus would provide. Dragging us away from all that Jesus has already given.

How do we escape those temptations? By the grace of God, He has given us His Word, where we are strengthened and learn of His saving power, forgiveness, and grace. There we are taught:

“If God is for us who can be against us?¹³”

“No one can take us from His hands.¹⁴”

“We have the peace that Jesus promised.¹⁵”

12 Acts 1:25

13 Romans 8:31

14 John 10:28

15 John 14:27

“I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me.¹⁶”

Jesus died burdened with Judas’ sin and with ours. He suffered the punishment for Judas’ sin and for ours. He died in Judas’ place and in ours. He paid the full cost of redemption for Judas, and for us, but Judas got nothing because he refused the faith freely offered. We have everything, everything, when we trust Jesus.

Amen.