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**Summer Preaching Series:**  
*Characters of the Bible*  
**Judas**

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A Sermon By  
The Rev. Richard D. Meadows, Jr.

August 12, 2018  
The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost  
Grace Episcopal Church  
Silver Spring, Maryland

# Summer Preaching Series

## *Characters of the Bible: Judas*

The Rev. Richard D. Meadows, Jr.  
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### **Matthew 26:47-56**

*While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. (He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?')*

*In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.*

Betrayal is a strange animal. We have been hurt in many ways, but betrayal hurts most when we are betrayed by someone who appeared as though they loved us. With the sign of Philema. The kiss, Judas turns Jesus over to the angry crowd armed with weapons.

Judas is with him from the beginning; the gathering of the twelve disciples. In the posthumous writings of the Gospel as early as Mark the 3rd chapter Judas is referred to as the one who betrayed Jesus. He is referenced as a liar, a thief, a betrayer, possessed by demons and one who valued money more than life. He is symbolized in art as an ugly man, black and sinister, the very essence of evil.

Based upon how he is referenced in the gospels, it would seem to be in his nature to betray the Son of man, the savior of the world. We were raised to characterize him as the villain in the Gospel story. Who ever wanted to play Judas in the Easter play?

In John's account Jesus says this:

<sup>18</sup>"I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.' <sup>21</sup>After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."

<sup>22</sup>His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. <sup>23</sup>One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. <sup>24</sup>Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

<sup>25</sup>Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. <sup>27</sup>As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

What an unexplainable twist in the plot of the crucifixion. Jesus himself says that in order for the scriptures to be fulfilled he must be betrayed by one sitting among him. I could go on and on about the evil deeds of Judas but I have another direction I'd like to take. So we must ask the question, was he this bad man as the other writers of the Gospel say he was? Was he the one elected before creation to be the one to fulfill the passages of scripture prophesying the death of Jesus? What about the humanity of Judas?

He seems as though he is a man who was never forgiven in a world where forgiveness reigns supreme. He is the eternal villain, the Snidely Whiplash of his day. He is symbolized by the church as the ultimate criminal both betrayer and murderer for committing suicide. His despair was so dark he leaves from the elders and scribes trying to return the thirty pieces of silver, after being rejected he runs to a field and he hangs himself. He is labeled as one who was so unstable that he betrays his friend with a kiss and then hangs himself.

I'd like to argue that his world as he knew it just ended, those who trusted him and those who he lived with for the past few years were now devastated at the arrest of Jesus. When Jesus is arrested, they all know now that the end is near. They scatter and run from trial and the crucifixion. They hear the angry voices and the trial before Pilate, they know what the end is going to be because Jesus himself predicted it. Judas repents, yes the text says that he repents for his deeds but the weight of betraying a friend is unbearable. Judas had already worked out a plan for betrayal and carried the burden to the grave. There is this one tender moment of compassion when Jesus asks him will he betray the Son of Man with a kiss, the symbol of friendship and adoration.

Judas had these last moments when he must have felt alone, he was rejected by the elders and scribes when he may have thought he be a hero for reporting and identifying Jesus. His reward, the thirty pieces of silver, were his to have. He repents and wants to return them but it's too late. His act of what he thought was heroism turn ugly and he now fights his own demons. He is in his darkest hour trying to figure out if it's better to die than to live.

He moves from the feeling of heroism to horror. He's moved from ideation to the reality of killing himself. Does he have friends or relatives; children, a wife, parents, siblings? Is there no one that could explain to him that his life is precious and that many would be heartbroken at his decision to end his life? Yes, he made a horrible mistake, one that would be memorialized but thirty pieces of silver and a suicide. Judas believes, the only way for him to transition from his betrayal to peace was to end his own life. In his last hours what was he thinking?

One this day; no, there are no seven last words, there is no mother at the foot of his cross, there is no vinegar to drink to ease his pain. He faces it the best way he could. I want to believe someone loves him, someone would have stood in the gap for him, someone would have been there for him, someone would have said, "I'll walk this journey with you." "Jesus would have forgiven you for your betrayal." Jesus said it himself, what was done was done to fulfill the scriptures.

John writes in the 17th chapter, <sup>12</sup>*While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by [c] that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.* Are these the words of Jesus or another moment when the Q writer took liberty? For me it's not so much the theological argument as much as this man has no other hope, he had no other way out, he's tormented by his actions. Where am I reaching with this Judas conversation? I'm telling you there is hope, I'm continually telling there is hope, I'm telling you with the breath of desperation that you are valuable and loved. You may have made a mistake, you may be hated by others, you may have friends who have said or written evil things about you, you may be bullied because of you weight, height, color, if you are black, white, LGBTQ, pro-life, pro-death penalty, depressed, oppressed or just plain old pressed; there is hope. Who is at risk? Common causes of suicide include: depression, drug abuse, financial problems, as well as difficulties with relationships.

What do we do when we find friends with unbearable weights and fears? We help our loved ones struggling with mental illness, those bullied, those who have suffered traumatic experience, disorders, loneliness, isolation, even the unemployed who are susceptible to suicidal ideations need our love. People are most driven to suicide when they view their current situation as being completely hopeless and feel as if they have no way to change things for the better.

If you have these feelings, thoughts or conversations, feel free to call Andrew, Amanda or me, call the Eucharistic minister, your friends, your family, teachers, don't give up, don't quit, know that you are loved.

*If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. You can also text HOME to 741-741 for free, 24-hour support from the Crisis Text Line. Outside of the U.S., please visit the International Association of Suicide Prevention for a database of resources.*