

Luke 22:39-53

³⁹ He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰When he reached the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’ ⁴¹Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ⁴²‘My God, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’ [[⁴³Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. ⁴⁴In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]] ⁴⁵When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, ⁴⁶and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; ⁴⁸but Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Humanity?’ ⁴⁹When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, ‘Lord, should we strike with the sword?’ ⁵⁰Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵²Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, ‘Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? ⁵³When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!’

It is an agonizing section of scripture –this entire scene – from the moment Jesus leaves the table of Passover, it is filled with agony, with pain, with disappointment.

Jesus' prayers that seem filled with desperation, pleading with his *Abba* for there to be another way – those desperate prayers we have all likely prayed at some point in our lives.

Jesus asking his disciples to pray with him – for their own strength in all that is to come. But, as so often happens, sleep overtakes our intention to pray – the disciples fall asleep while trying to pray – they try to keep vigil, but sleep wins out.

The scene is so agonizing that it is likely that some scribe thought it too bleak, that it looked too much like God has abandoned the Son, and so an angel was inserted into the scene. Verses 43 & 44 do not show up in the oldest versions of the Bible that have been found, and so they were likely added, this is why in most of our Bibles these verses are in (parentheses) or [brackets] of some kind. So, perhaps a scribe at some point believed that this scene just felt too much like God had abandoned Jesus in his darkest hour, so they added an angel. But, that is just a theory.

And then, of course, the pain and disappointment continue when Jesus is arrested, betrayed by one of those closest to him – betrayed with a kiss. Such a personal betrayal, this kiss of Judas.

Judas who had this highest of callings, to be a disciple of Jesus – to be one of the twelve – those who were to be closest to Jesus: to learn from him daily, to hear his teachings, to see the lives he was changing – to be see and experience transformation, that they too might go and too be agents of God's great transformative power. What a great and powerful calling, to be a

disciple of Jesus. And yet for Judas, there must have been something greater that would not allow him to fully surrender to Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God, something that could not fully accept the God that Jesus was presenting to the disciples and the world – something that kept Judas from being open to what God was doing in Jesus – from what God was trying to do in Judas.

What might have kept Judas from being open to what God was doing in Jesus? What kept him from being fully the disciple he was called to be? From being a vessel of healing and hope for the world?

1. Was it as simple as the Allure of money? Scripture tells us that Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Not a lot of money, perhaps about 5-6 weeks worth of wages for someone like Judas. But, we are told that Judas kept the common purse for the disciples – he was their Treasurer and Bookkeeper. The Gospel of *John* narrates to us that Judas used to skim off the top, that he would steal from their common purse – so, if this was the case, then it isn't hard to imagine this most traditional view of the reason behind Judas' betrayal – thirty pieces of silver.

And this should not be hard for us to imagine, that it was a love of money that kept Judas from being fully open to the God of Jesus Christ, for Jesus himself told us that we “cannot serve God and wealth.” And while I haven't conducted any official surveys, I would imagine that it is the allure of wealth and the security it brings that has probably caused more people to abandon the God of Jesus Christ than any other single reason – or, to at least greatly alter the way in which we interpret our calling as followers of Jesus. Perhaps Judas, like many who came after

him, was like the “Rich Young Ruler”, one who could not surrender his possessions to follow Christ.

I have shared a bit of my own struggles with how to faithfully live a financial life in this world as a follower of Jesus – mostly it feels like guilt-filled decisions that cause me great angst and uncertainty – until finally, I give into doing what most other Middle-class Americans do: buy a home, build a savings account, buy life insurance. Never really squaring these with my faith, but doing them anyway: wondering if I am a ‘Christian Capitalist’ or the other way around.

Perhaps it was the slow erosion of being in charge of the common purse that wore Judas down over those three years – the slow allure of a bit more money, a bit more security...the call of just a bit more that closes Judas off from the fullness of his calling as a disciple of Jesus.

2. Or, it may be that Judas is afraid – that he too sees what is coming for Jesus – that he is a realist and able to recognize that Jesus’ choice to come to Jerusalem will mean arrest and likely death. The disciple Thomas, when Jesus announced that he will return to Jerusalem, says, “then let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Perhaps Judas did not agree with his colleague Thomas, that if Jesus wanted to die, well that was his choice, but he had no desire to die with him. And so perhaps Judas simply wants to save his own neck, believing that the only way he had some of his fellow disciples will escape with their own lives is to be seen as cooperating with the authorities.

If this was the case, well, I would have a hard time blaming Judas. I have a harder time forgiving Judas if was for 30 pieces of silver, but if it grew from ever-powerful fear – this is a bit more understandable. When people ask me about some of my self-learnings/self-discovery from

our trip with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) to Iraq, one of my answers is this: I always have believed that those who seem to make the greatest impact in this world are those who live without fear of death. We met multiple people like that in Northern Iraq – those who are trying to make their country a safer and more loving place for the future, no matter what it costs them. From meeting these people and being there in a war-torn country, I learned that I do not live without fear of death.

Of course, it is not just fear of death, but other fears that hold me back as I seek to follow Jesus: the fear of saying the wrong thing, the fear of conflict, the fear of failing, the fear of one of you being mad at me, the fear of having my true insecurities and failures seen by others. No, it is not hard to imagine that it was fear that kept Judas from being fully open to the love of God in Jesus Christ – that fear blocked his ability to experience the fullness of God’s Kingdom.

3. Or, it might be argued that Judas had lost his hope – his hope in what Jesus would and could do. Judas had given up his whole life to come and follow Jesus – he trusted that in leaving his home and family and all he had known, that this would lead to a great transformation. But after three years of following this man, he was losing his hope – he no longer believed that Jesus could expel the Romans and Make Israel Great once again.

It is a hard thing, to lose our hope or our idealism. I remember the first time losing my idealism shortly after beginning my first “*real job*”. It didn’t take long until all the ways I felt confident that I would change the world came crashing down and I felt my smallness and insignificance. It can be a dark and lonely time, when our hope begins to wane. I read somewhere that one sure sign of burnout is when you start to feel that you are the only one who

truly cares, and you feel like you are the only one really trying to work to make a difference. It is a lonely feeling, feeling yourself start to burnout, slowly losing hope for change, slowly growing in your anger at those around you and your perception of their apathy and lack of action.

And so perhaps instead of using his community for support and understanding, as Judas lost hope, he was ready to give it all up – ready for it to be over. So in a weakened state of hopelessness, when a representative of the High Priest offered him a deal to betray Jesus and be free of this whole mess – he didn't have the hope left to keep running the race and fighting the good fight. Perhaps it was his loss of hope that caused him to give up on himself and to give up on Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God; perhaps he was just looking for an out.

4. Or, it might – as some scholars have argued in recent years – that it was Judas' inability to give up his prior views of who God is, and who the Messiah would be that kept him from fully embracing the God of Jesus Christ; that Judas would not relinquish his prior vision of God, to Jesus' vision of God. If we think we have all the answers already, it is hard to be open to something new that God is doing in the world.

I know that some of you are familiar with the idea proposed that Judas was not trying to betray Jesus, but was simply trying to get Jesus to be the Conquering Messiah that Judas believed him to be. Judas, was thought to be a Zealot, a sub-group of Judaism that plotted violent revolt against the Romans – they believed that the Messiah would come and lead them all in an uprising against Rome and that together they would overthrow Rome and take their place once again as a world power – that they would return Jerusalem to its once former glory – that the Messiah would be a New King David.

If Judas was a Zealot, then some believe that Judas hoped that if he brought men with weapons to arrest Jesus in the night, that Jesus would not stand for it – that if he painted Jesus into a corner, than Jesus would come out fighting. And that this would essentially be the first battle of Jesus the Conqueror – where Jesus would lead an uprising to overthrow Herod, and Pilate, and eventually Cesar – calling all his followers and all the angels to join the battle.

If this was the case, then when Jesus yelled, “No more of this” and told Peter to put his sword away – when, in the Garden, Jesus used his hands as an instrument of healing rather than to wield a weapon – then Judas must have known the gross error of his judgment. He would have seen in that moment that he was so wrong – that his view of God and who the Messiah would be, they never fully were open to be molded and shaped by Jesus. That despite spending three years following Jesus, he was never truly open to the God that Jesus was illuminating; that no matter how many times he heard Jesus say to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, or when he saw Jesus heal the daughter of a Roman soldier – that none of that ever really got past Judas’ preconceived notions of who God was and what the Messiah would do. If this was his motive then it seems clear that Judas was never truly open to the vision ways of God’s kingdom Jesus was living, he was never truly open to a God who could transform the world without using the weapons of war.

And I guess, we can sympathize a bit with Judas here as well – for how many times have we read the words of Jesus, not in search of transformation, but rather to affirm our own position; how many times have we looked to the scriptures or gone to prayer, not to meet the God of Transformation, but to meet the God who we have formed in our own image and in our own opinions. How many times have we missed what God was doing in the world because it did not

mesh with how we think God can and should work? Yes, it is easy to miss where God might be leading us when we are confident that we already have all the answers – or, that might just be a problem for preachers.

The season of Lent is a time when we are invited into the uncomfortable space of considering our own discipleship – of the pieces of our own lives that might be keeping us from being more fully open to the God of Jesus Christ – that might be keeping us from surrendering to the beautiful and difficult calling to follow the Christ:

- it may be our need for economic security upon which we can trust
- or it may be fear; of death, of failure, of conflict, of consequences, of being vulnerable
- it might be that we are in a dark time when we feel a bit of hopelessness and yet continue to bury that feeling and try to do it on our own
- or perhaps our preconceived views of who God is have placed a cataract over our ability to see the places the Spirit of God is inviting us in
- and of course, there are numerous other ways that we might closing ourselves off to our calling to be vessels of transformative love .

During Lent we are invited to consider what we still might need to surrender to the Christ who bids us to pick up our cross daily and follow him.

And even now, as we pause to examine where we might surrender a bit more to God's Spirit, let us remember that the Gospels are clear, *discipleship is not for perfect people* – the path of

discipleship is for people who continually make mistakes and yet, even in their failing and confusion, continue to get up from the table and follow Jesus. We are called to seek the light of Christ. But we are not called to pretend the darkness does not exist.

May the God who works through human partners open us to examine where we are less than receptive.

May the Christ who loved and forgave Judas, remind us that we too are forgiven.

And may the Spirit who attended to Jesus in his moments of fear, also attend to us – that we might be a people who seek the difficult and beautiful path of discipleship – that healing and hope might flow through us and into the world. Amen.