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**PALM SUNDAY**

**April 9, 2017**

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**“Betrayed”**  
*(Mt. 26:14-16)*  
Rev. David K. Groth

*“Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him” (Mt. 26:14-16).*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...  
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

**Collect of the Day:** Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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“Judas” used to be a popular name. There was Judas Maccabaeus, a Jewish priest who in 167 B.C. led a successful revolt against Greece. Another Judas, son of James, was one of the apostles. Paul stayed with a Judas in Damascus and had Judas Barsabbas as a traveling companion on the journey to Antioch. Judas used to be a popular name. Not so much anymore. Some would even consider it cruel to name a child Judas, not unlike giving him the name Adolf.

Yet Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. Each of the four Gospels treats him slightly differently. Each provides a few tantalizing hints as to who he was. We know him as the betrayer, the one who sold out Jesus to his enemies. But there must have been more to Judas than that. There must have been something about Judas that Jesus found compelling. After all, Jesus did call Judas to follow.

Apparently he was the treasurer. He carried the purse. He made arrangements for food and lodging. When a woman one time opened a flask of expensive perfume and poured it over Jesus’ feet, Judas objected. The perfume was precious, after all. It could have been sold and the money given to the poor. He sounds so pious, but John tells us the reason Judas objected had nothing to do with compassion for the poor. It was because Judas, as the treasurer, had sticky fingers. He used to help himself to the contents of the moneybag.

We know that a day or so after Jesus came to Jerusalem Judas went to the temple, met with the authorities, and asked them “What’ll you give me to betray Jesus?” The

authorities had already decided to arrest him. The problem, of course, are those crowds. Everywhere Jesus goes now he's surrounded by a large crowd who will surely raise a big fuss if they see Jesus arrested. So the authorities need to find a time and place when Jesus is mostly alone. And that would be in Gethsemane. For thirty pieces of silver, Judas leads a posse, the temple guards with swords and clubs and torches right to where Jesus is and identifies him with a kiss.

Why did Judas do that? We really don't know. Of course, it could have been the money. People will do all kinds of things for a few dollars. After the funeral I've seen families tear themselves apart over who gets a piece of furniture. Maybe it was the money.

And maybe Judas had been hoping Jesus would declare himself the new king of Judah and usher back a glorious and powerful reign not seen since the days of David. Maybe Judas became deeply disappointed in Jesus when it became clear Jesus was not interested in that sort of power. After all, Jesus just had a huge crowd welcoming him to the capital city as a conquering hero! What was it that they said? "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! *Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!*" (Mk. 11:10). And what with all those palm branches and cloaks and especially the donkey, that's the way kings always entered Jerusalem for the coronation (1 Kings 1:32-40). The people seemed primed, ready for change, ready to pledge their allegiance to Jesus as king and revolt against Herod and Pilate and all the rest declare Jewish independence. And what better day to do that than during Passover, when the Lord gave independence to his ancient people and brought them out of Egypt.

But what does Jesus do? He squanders the opportunity. He goes into the temple courts and ticks off a few money changers and then does nothing but teach and preach again! And maybe it ticks off Judas too. How could he let this chance slip from his hands? Maybe in his disillusionment Judas just doesn't care anymore. Maybe he's resolved to split from the twelve and do something new,

and needs a little seed money to start a business. Who knows? For whatever his motive is, he walks away with thirty silver coins in his pocket.

But later, it does seem to surprise Judas how everything unfolds. In the past, when the authorities tried to trap Jesus or when his home town crowd tried to throw him over a cliff and stone him, Jesus was always able to slip away. But this time Jesus doesn't even try. He doesn't slip away. And when Judas sees how the late-night trial before Caiaphas goes, and, and in the morning, how a second hearing before Pontius Pilate goes – when Judas sees how Jesus is so severely flogged and mocked and then condemned to be crucified, the enormity of his betrayal becomes clear. He knows he's responsible. If only he could turn the clock back and undo it. But he cannot. In a desperate attempt to assuage his own guilt, he takes the thirty pieces of silver back to the temple, and begs the priests to take it back. They refuse. "What is that to us" they say. "That is your responsibility." They care nothing about the man standing before them. They care nothing about the desperate and broken soul of the man standing before them. So Judas throws the coins on the floor and runs.

Betrayals can happen for what seem to be very good reasons at the time. Betrayals can happen for the money. They can happen for romance and sex. They can happen for the promotion. They can happen out anger or sadness or ambition or jealousy. Betrayals can happen for what seem to be good reasons at the time.

Of course, you and I have betrayed Jesus for far less than thirty pieces of silver. We have betrayed him in order to fit in and not make waves. We have betrayed him because we don't want to be thought of as some sort of religious freak. Visiting a friend or a coworker after the surgery, you could have offered to say a prayer with him, even if you printed one off the internet, but you didn't, out of fear. Or maybe you didn't because you were ashamed of Jesus, ashamed of being pegged as a Christian. That's called betrayal.

Talk of missed opportunities! How many times has God given you a chance to really let the light of your faith shine? He led someone to you, for your Christian witness. He teed it up for you. He lobbed a big fat soft ball right into your strike zone, and you didn't even whiff because you didn't take a swing. Often we betray Jesus by being silent and unmoving.

You and I have betrayed Jesus for far less than thirty pieces of silver. Therefore you and I are not just the innocent spectators of the crucifixion of Jesus. No we are culpable. With Judas, we share the responsibility. You and I put him on the cross with our betrayal.

On Good Friday, we'll hear again the "Seven Last Words" of Jesus from the cross. And the first of those seven was when he looked down on those who had betrayed, flogged, mocked and crucified him. He said, "Father, forgiven them." Realize, nobody was asking for his forgiveness. But he took the initiative and forgave them for the evil they were doing.

And that is the final tragedy of Judas Iscariot. Among the saddest verses in the Bible is surely this one: "And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, Judas departed and he went and hanged himself." If only Judas had stuck around long enough to hear those words from the cross, "Father, forgive them." If only Judas had stuck around long enough to discover that Jesus still loved him, that nothing he did, not even betrayal, could separate Judas from God's love in Jesus. If only Judas had been there in the room with the other disciples after the resurrection to see and heard the risen Lord say, "Peace be with you." If only Judas had been there. But instead, Judas took matters into his own hands.

[Confirmands], in the years ahead you will have tons of opportunities to betray Jesus, in what you say and don't say, in what you do and fail to do. Tons of opportunities! And you will betray him. We all do. And later, when your conscience catches up, it's going to make you feel awful. It's going to make you feel like a second-rate Christian, or

no Christian at all—just a sham. But that is not the time to run from Jesus. That is the time to run back to the cross and hear Jesus say, “Father forgive them.”

That is the time to run to where God promises to locate himself for you for your forgiveness. Run to baptism. That is, in spite of betraying Jesus, remember you remain his baptized child, which means he still loves you.

And come to worship too to confess your sin and to hear his absolution. Remember what Jesus promised to his church? “I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt. 16:19). So “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven” (Jn. 20:22). So don’t run from, but run back to him again and again, week after week in repentance, so that, quote, “your sins may be wiped out, and that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Peter said that, and he would know, wouldn’t he? He denied Jesus multiple times and the rooster crowed. But then he took Jesus at his word, who promised, “Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out” (Jn. 6:37). So keep coming back to the Lord your God.

You recall none of the disciples did very well in the final twenty-four hours of Jesus’ life. Judas betrayed him. Peter denies even knowing him. The rest abandon him to save their own skins. Later, all are forgiven and restored. Only Judas prevented that opportunity by taking matters into his own hands.

He never got to hear the gracious words, “I forgive you all your sins” – but we can.

He never again heard those beautiful words, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest” but we can.

He never learned that God could still use him in his kingdom, in spite of his track record . . . but you can.

He never heard the promise Jesus made right before he ascended into heaven, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” but you have.

He never again got to put the cup of life to his lips and hear the words, “Take drink, this is my blood, shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins” but you are about to.

He never got to see the Lord face to face in heaven, but by the grace of the One who said, “Father forgive them” you will. Amen.

