

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Ash Wednesday
Wednesday, February 14, 2024, at 7:00 p.m.

“Judas”

Zechariah 11:10-14; Acts 1:16-20; Matthew 26:20-25

The passion of Jesus Christ was all about people. Jesus suffered and died for people. You are the object of His Passion. Some of these same people for whom Jesus died had a hand in his suffering and death. All kinds of people were there. As the hymn writer says, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” That hymn is a brilliant use of *anamnesis*. From the Greek, anamnesis literally means to remember. Yet, it is much more than simple mental recall of an event. It calls the community to remember the past into the present, to bring these historic events to bear in the now and make them part of our story.

“Were You There” is then an anamnetic song that is meant to bring the past events of Christ’s suffering and death into the present and remind us that our sins put Jesus on that cross just as much as the sins of Judas Iscariot, but we are also reminded that we are just as forgiven as anyone who stood at the foot of the cross or in the empty grave.

We gather again to ponder Jesus’ passion, culminating in his death and his resurrection. We will do so by looking closely at several people of the passion. We

will ask you to put yourself in their places. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Imagine that you are there—a part of the passion of Jesus Christ. See what that tells you about his sacrifice.

Today, we look at the infamous Judas Iscariot. We have questions: “How,” we ask, “could Judas be one of Jesus’ trusted disciples and then deliberately turn him over to his enemies to suffer and die? How could he do it? What can we learn from this man who was the devil’s pawn?”

To better understand this, imagine if you will, that you are a guard at a Nazi concentration camp. Can you imagine doing such a thing? If you don’t understand why German Lutherans thinking that they are only serving the greater good could serve as guards at a Nazi concentration camp or you think that you could not possibly participate in such a thing, then you don’t really understand original sin. Judas is not some mustache-twisting cartoon villain who came up with this master plan to kill the Messiah. But just like God told Cain before he killed his brother Abel that “evil was crouching at his door and was seeking to devour him,” Cain killed him anyway.

So also Jesus gave fair warning to Judas. “Woe to that man. It would have been better for that man if he had never been born.” But Judas betrays Him anyway.

From what we know of Judas Iscariot, we have no way of knowing what his motivation was – besides the money, which he doesn’t even keep. We know money was a motivation. In John’s Gospel, John tells us that Judas was the

keeper of the spending money for Jesus and the disciples and that Judas was a thief.

All that we can know is what Scripture tells us. Judas had to be a person of the passion so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled. The psalmist (Ps 41:9) had predicted that the Messiah's close friend, who ate bread with him, would lift up his heel against him. Judas was that friend.

Still, it all started quite well. Judas was a zealous supporter of Jesus. He certainly was not the only disciple with flawed thinking in regard to why the Messiah had come. None of them believed what Jesus told them of His crucifixion or resurrection or what kind of kingdom He was establishing. "My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus tells Pilate.

It is speculated that Judas sought to betray Jesus as a way of spurring on the revolution against Rome that many thought the Messiah would bring. But in that regard, all we can engage in is reckless speculation.

Was his betrayal meant to be a catalyst for revolution? What we do know is that Satan entered his heart, and Judas went to the Jewish council and offered to deliver Jesus to them at an opportune time. They offered the traitor 30 pieces of silver to deliver Jesus, the exact value placed on an Israelite slave. He sold his Lord Jesus, and his own soul, for the price of redeeming a slave – the very price of which Zechariah foretold.

Judas never enjoyed the money. His faith had died, but not his conscience. Tormented by the Law written on his heart, he tried to return the money, but he

did not look to Jesus. Hell had claimed him, and in despair—even before the verdict was passed to crucify Jesus—Judas plunged into eternity at the end of a rope.

We look back at Judas with sadness, not just because of what he did to Jesus but because of what he did to himself. We look back with some contempt, but I think that it soon disappears when we think of ourselves along with Judas.

Most everyone has had moments when we stood where Judas once stood, on the brink of spiritual disaster with the storms of doubt shaking our very souls? However, by the grace of God, we leave the way of Judas for the way of Jesus. We have security: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Ro 8:31). We have peace: “My peace I give you,” says Jesus (Jn 14:27). We have the strength of God on our side: “I can do all things through [Christ] who gives me strength” (Php 4:13). We have love and comfort in our crucified and risen Lord and Redeemer.

Jesus died burdened with Judas’ sin and with our sins. He suffered the punishment for Judas’ sin and for our sins. He died in Judas’ stead and in our stead. He paid the full cost of redemption for Judas and for us. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Our sins put Jesus on that cross just as much as the sins of Judas Iscariot, but we are also reminded that we are just as forgiven as anyone who stood at the foot of the cross or in the empty grave – and, in faith, bore witness of our crucified and risen Lord. Amen.