

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Lent 1 Mid-Week
Wednesday, March 12, 2025, at 7:00 p.m.

“Betraying Eyes”

Mark 14:10–21, 32, 41–46

Judas will forever be a name associated with betrayal, with treachery, with handing over the innocent Jesus to sinful men who would see to His death. Tonight we will begin by looking at and through the betraying eyes of Judas, but what I want to lead you to is the recognition that it’s most important for us to take a hard look at ourselves and then fix our eyes on Jesus.

Mark writes, “Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them” (14:10). Mark’s mention that Judas was “one of the twelve” highlights the deeply personal nature of his treachery and the brazenness of his betrayal. Judas had been chosen out of countless Jewish men to be one of the twelve apostles, a select group who had the privilege of being in the inner circle of God’s Son for three years.

Judas knew firsthand the love and mercy of Jesus and had witnessed His powerful miracles. He had heard the Beatitudes again and again; he had had the parable of the rich fool and warnings about greed drummed into his ears; he had gone out and preached in Jesus’ name; he had heard the warnings about those who preached in the Lord’s name but are shocked on Judgment Day to find out that their faithlessness has landed them in hell. If you want to see Exhibit 1 of someone who had all the right things taught to him but then rebelled against it, it’s Judas.

Judas had sought out the chief priests with an offer to hand Jesus over to them, “And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money.” The Jewish leaders were seeking an inconspicuous location to arrest Jesus, and Judas would provide them with an ideal opportunity, in the middle of the night in an isolated garden. And as we know from the other Gospels, Judas was a greedy man, even a thief, so he must have looked at this betrayal as an opportunity to line his pockets.

Judas’s plan was in place, but first he had to wait through the preparation for the Passover meal and the meal itself. At dinner, Jesus drops this bomb on the twelve apostles: “As they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me, one who is eating with Me’” (Mark 14:18). Try to picture what the twenty-six eyes at that table were doing. Jesus seems to be calmly looking around, knowing by His divine omniscience exactly who it is but not giving anything away. Mark says that “they began to be sorrowful and to say to [Jesus] one after another, ‘Is it I?’” You can picture them looking around the room with suspicion, wondering, “Who must it be?” You can picture the tears streaming down some of the faces to express their grief at what Jesus was predicting.

What were Judas’s eyes doing? Did he look down in shame? Did he nervously glance around to see if he was suspected? Did he put on a good show and act like the rest of them? We can’t know for sure, but I’d bet on the latter.

What’s striking about Mark’s account of this scene is that Jesus doesn’t name Judas. We don’t hear that the traitor is Judas until the Garden of Gethsemane. Why do you suppose that is?

Perhaps Jesus wanted each of the Twelve to examine himself and see if he had the capability to betray innocent blood, to commit treason against his Lord. Likewise, Jesus wants each of us to examine our own loyalty to the Lord.

“It is I?” That fear-filled question gets to the heart of this account, highlighting that all of us have participated in the sin of Judas; we all have committed treason, turning against our Lord; that’s what our sin is: betrayal of our King of grace. And if we were to die in our sin, it certainly would have been better for us not to have been born.

That’s why it’s such good news when Jesus says in the Upper Room, “The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him” (Mark 14:21), and then in the garden, “The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners” (v. 41). Jesus came specifically for this purpose, to be betrayed and to pour out His holy, precious blood and suffer an innocent death to atone for your sin, for Judas’s sin, for the sin of the whole world. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

There are deep mysteries here. Judas was morally culpable for his betrayal of Jesus and justly paid the price for his sin and impenitence, even though the Scriptures had foretold this would happen. God did not force Judas to do anything, but it was Judas’s sinful will, along with the devil’s prompting, that led him to this. Yet behind the scenes, this was what God wanted to see all along. The Father wanted to punish His Son for our sake; the Father wanted to hand over His Son to this death; and the Son went willingly, out of love for you and me and all sinners.

The verb we translate as “betray” in this text can also have the simple meaning “to hand over” or “to deliver.” Romans 4:24–25 says that faith will be counted for righteousness “to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Who did the handing over? Judas, to be sure, but above all, God the Father loved the world this way: He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever

believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. So fix your eyes on the One who, for you, became a curse on the tree of the cross, and find salvation in Him.

You traitors, you Judases, in Baptism you have been washed in the blood of the Lamb of God, the same One you betrayed. Don't try to hide your crimes; confess them. Those words ring in my ears also. He is not surprised that we are sinners; He knew that as He went to the cross to establish His kingdom of grace, and He knows that now even as He forgives the sins of all who repent. For every time that you have betrayed Him; for every time that you have made promises to Him you couldn't keep; for all of the commitments to your Lord you have failed to keep, remember this: there is forgiveness for you. There is forgiveness for you as the words of Absolution drum into your ears, as the grace of Baptism comes to your remembrance, as the forgiving, life-giving body and blood of Jesus is given into your mouth.

That verb we translate as "betraying" but that also can mean "handing over" or "delivering" is used by St. Paul in a remarkable place in his writings, in 1 Corinthians 11:23. He uses the verb twice there, writing, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was delivered took bread . . ." Yes, we are accustomed to hearing "on the night when He was betrayed," and that is certainly correct, but what is most important is that God the Father handed Jesus over to death in our place; the apostles handed down to us the Words of Institution for the Lord's Supper; and in that Meal, Jesus hands His body and blood over to us for forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

And we respond with joy, "Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace . . . My own eyes have seen the salvation." Amen.