

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 10 2025

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Bad Apples of the Bible: Judas

Based on Matthew 26-27

The ultimate betrayal.
Handing over our Saviour to be crucified. Is it possible that we could, in any way defend Judas? We shall see.

My mother was a primary school teacher most of her professional life. In the days before hot lunches, Hot Dog Fridays were a big deal, for those who could afford the 25 cents it cost. All week, quarters were collected, and on Friday, a glorious hot, hot dog would arrive while the rest of your classmates ate cold sandwiches.

One Fall, though, the quarters began to disappear from my mother's teaching desk. She had a suspect in mind: a child of a poor family who never had extra money; a child picked on and taunted by the children because of his clothes, his struggle to learn; you know the story.

But rather than accuse the child, Mother put the child in charge of collecting the hot dog money each week. Now everyone in the classroom, even the bullies, had to go through him to order their hot lunch.

Curiously enough, the disappearing money disappeared. And of course, the obvious conclusion is, that the child knew full well he was now accountable. If money continued to disappear, he would be blamed. But I can't help but wonder if another reason the problem disappeared, was because for maybe the first time, this child was someone important, a valued member of the class with a role to play (from a five year old's perspective); not just the poor kid left in the corner.

Judas was in charge of the money. But I'm not sure money was the real problem here. Not too much is known historically about him, only that he was a latecomer to the Jesus Movement. He was not on the shore of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus called Andrew and Simon. He was not around when James and John the sons of Zebedee joined the ranks. He slipped in quietly along the way, and for some reason, was put in charge of the money.

Ø Historians have labeled him a thief, and concluded that he was caught helping himself to Jesus' slush fund, and betrayed the Saviour in order to cover his tracks.

Ø Other scholars suggest Judas was secretly part of a zealous group of radicals, and

he only played along as a disciple in order to get close to Jesus and set a trap for him.

Ø Artists generally paint Judas with bright, crafty looking eyes, which makes you think: was he a sneaky devil, or very clever, or both?

And the Gospel writers? Not one ounce of pity is given to Judas. Shame, shame, shame! But let's keep in mind that these writers are some of the same men who either denied Jesus, or hid in fear when the events of Calvary were unfolding.

It is possible they found in Judas:

- A disciple late to the game,
- A disciple who was not part of the inner circle,
- A man not as well known as some of the others:
- A perfect scapegoat.

Write Judas' story and point all the blame at him, It helped to deflect from their own lack of faith. Now you might think that I'm stretching things a bit here, but if you recall, the Gospel writers did the same thing to Thomas. Thomas the Doubter. But Thomas wasn't the only one in the room that day in the early hours after the resurrection who was doubting, while hiding in a cellar. But that never got

written down, now did it?

So, we are left with this one, big, lingering question? Why did Judas do it? Why did he betray his Saviour?

I think we can find some possible insights in the beginning of his story, and in its terrible ending. We know that the religious and legal and Roman authorities were collectively working together, looking for a way to rid themselves of Jesus and the growing number of believers. They were biding their time, but they were looking for a weak link.

And in the door Judas walked, offering to do the dirty deed for them! He found them!

- Did he need the money, those thirty pieces of silver?

- Did he see the opportunity for his true rebellious nature to come to the fore?

- Was he tired of being pushed aside by the other disciples, treated unfairly in his mind, and going to take his revenge?

- Was he smarter than the rest, recognizing that for the prophecies to come to fulfilment, the betrayal had to be set in motion by someone, and so he chose to become a martyr for the faith? No crucifixion, no resurrection. No resurrection, no salvation. Someone had to take the fall so that we might have salvation. (this one made me pause)

When Jesus said, "Do what you came for, friend," (26:26)

did He lean into the word 'friend' as if to say, "You are no friend of mine," or did our Saviour look at Judas with some relief, knowing that finally, one of his disciples truly understood the holy significance of this moment, and helped the prophetic words along to their ultimate conclusion? Even though that conclusion was torture, and death. Because from that death came resurrection.

Was Judas possibly the only one who really understood Jesus' purpose in its truest form? (that's rather hard to contemplate)

And then there is a horrible awareness that creeps into Judas, almost in the same moment that he has cast his lot with the enemy. "I have done wrong. I have done very wrong." He tried to fix it. But it was too late. The opportunity the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Romans had been waiting for, had set in motion a series of events that were out of everyone's hands. Judas could not fix this. No one could fix this. And a man would die because of his actions: holy, or otherwise. Judas displayed regret and remorse with a depth that chills us. Yet oddly, it's not the same emotion we get from the other disciples. Perhaps a little from Peter as the rooster began to crow.

Like Thomas, who will forever be recorded in history as the one (and only one) who doubted the risen Christ, Judas will forever be blamed for

betraying the Saviour to death. And rightly so. But I see also, a man caught between worldly desires of wealth and place, a man in search of respect, a man eager to be inspired, who gets enmeshed in the web of deceit, intrigue and power. I see also a man who lived his remorse, acknowledged his mistakes, and attempted to repair the damage. I do not see that with the other disciples. I see instead, an eagerness to deflect the blame, and move on to happier stories.

Judas, a bad apple? Yes. A very bad apple.

But not rotten!

After all is said and done, we have to acknowledge: Christ saw something in Judas, or He would not have welcomed him to join the Band of Merry Men. So instead of seeing a betrayer, I ask myself, "What did Jesus see in Judas?"

Intellect and intelligence?

Worldly savvy?

Honesty of his shortcomings?

Eager for something more than mediocrity in life?

A man brave enough to die for the cause?

What did Jesus see in Judas?

What does Jesus see in you?

Why has He asked you to join Him?

Will you be the apple of His eye?