

Betrayal. A sermon preached on April 2, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons: JAMES 1:13-16

MATTHEW 26:14-16, 47-50; 27:1-5

This morning I want to invite you into that part of Matthew's story Karenza read so well a few moments ago.

Imagine you are there

What do you hear, what do you smell, is the wind blowing or is it quiet?

What about the night sounds – perhaps an animal crying on the hillside

Muffled conversations from far off or near by – for sound travels, especially in the evening hours.

If you have ever walked into a situation where you sense something important has happened, but you don't know any of the details – yet!!

This is the point at which I invite you to enter the story

You hear a low voice, full of emotion and sighs – what have I done?

What have I done?

What have I done?

You follow the voice.

The darkness prevents this man from seeing you. In any case this man is so wrapped up in his emotions – he probably would not notice you until you were right on top of him.

But you hesitate

...the man is obviously in deep distress.

You think for a moment – better listen, before I get closer.

Is this something I really want to involve myself in – after all it has been a draining week of “issues” with others and there is still more to deal with tomorrow morning.

You listen – you can hear every word, dripping with emotion.

You hear the laboured breathing, full of sighs

The man is flailing his arms

He is standing up, pacing then sitting down.

He holds his head between his hands, then sighs

What have I done?

Where did it all go so wrong?

If only the Master had done what he was supposed to do!!!

What I know he’s capable of doing.

Now, what to do, what to do

I don’t know where the others are – not that they really care about me now.

For the word has already spread about what I
 did in the garden
 How I arranged the meeting with the Master and
 the Temple thugs.

...Oh, who cares about uncultivated lumps like
 Thomas, Nathanael?

Number cruncher Matthew,
 Bean counter Philip

Or Peter for that matter –

That meal at Mary and Martha's.

Okay, I guess I understand about the celebration of
 the raising of Lazarus from the dead – that WAS
 pretty neat

But then that stupid and wasteful woman – pouring
 all that nard on Jesus' feet

Why we could have given all that money to
 help the poor!

And if that woman had done just that – and I would
 have received it, as the keeper of the Master's purse,
 Then I could easily have replaced the little sums I
 have borrowed for the past few months

For I just know by the looks that piece of
 work Mathew has been giving me,
 That sooner rather than later, he is going to want to
 take me aside and count out what is in the "purse"
 to make sure the purse tallies with what he believes
 ought to be there.

Between him and Philip they have probably been
 keeping a running total on the expenses anyway....

That dinner at the sisters' house now seems a
long time ago

And here I am – all by myself

Now, with enough money to replace the
'borrowed funds'

But I really don't want the pieces of silver now

The man senses your presence, before he sees you

IS SOMEONE THERE

I HAVE A KNIFE AND I KNOW HOW TO USE IT!

Who are you? I don't know you

Were you in this garden a little while ago?

Did you see what happened after we scattered?

Do you know where they have taken the one called
Jesus?

What about those standing closest to him

Do you know where any of them are?

Did they pass you?

Do you know what I am talking about?

Is that head shaking a yes or no? Well, at least
you are not a mute.

Wait! Don't back away.

I NEED someone to talk to...

I won't hurt you.....see knife away in its scabbard.

My name is Judas Iscariot

Ah, you have heard about me – yes, one of the man
Jesus' followers

Yes, ... the keeper of the purse.

You are eyeing those silver coins aren't you...?

yes, you are!

Pretty little things aren't they. So shiny in this dull light

Well, these pretty little things are yours if you want them.

Do I look crazy? You can have them.

If I tell you the story and if you still want them then they are yours.

Why am I making this offer to you stranger?
I need to have someone hear my side...because no one else is listening to me

(Great sighs and tears follow for a moment – then wiping his face with his sleeve – Judas continues)

You are right to remember me as one of Jesus' followers – for I am – or at least I WAS until this evening

Since Jesus called me to follow him I have seen things I never expected to see
A huge crowd fed by 5 loaves and two fish and with leftovers for everyone to take home
Ever seen people walking on water – and not because they know where the stones are – no walking on waves – well Jesus did just that – walked on water -no really Jesus really did!!

Stranger, I have seen the lame walking and the
blind being given sight – owing to Jesus touch and
words

Why I have even seen the dead rise – no fooling –
dead man walking – not dead – but as alive as you
and me

And teaching.

I have never heard such teaching
I saw peoples' lives turn completely around because
of some homey story that Jesus told.

And then Jesus talking about the coming of
the Kingdom of God – well that really excited me.
For I saw it, as did so many as the beginning of the
end of Roman rule and oppression in this land.
And what would replace the Romans?

Why God's kingdom of course!

Three years, I heard Jesus talk about, preach
about the Kingdom of God.

I waited and waited and waited for Him to act on
those promises about the Kingdom

But it never happened – sorry I did not mean
to shake you – forgive me

The Roman continued to occupy our land and
oppress our people

And the Romans do not seem very up on the love of
God

Your nod tells me stranger that you have experienced or know all too well about the Roman tendency to violence.

As I said,

I waited, and waited and waited...no worldly overthrow of the Romans came.

Gosh I thought when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that donkey it was odd, but then maybe it was a ruse to get the Romans to drop their guard and so the heavenly battle plan would catch them by surprise.

But nothing!!!!

So, finally I thought,

Maybe Jesus just needs some prompting and encouragement – a little push to action.

So I went looking for those who I knew were looking to arrest him on some trumped up charge of insurrection

That will force Jesus to act as he should – the Kingdom of God shall descend with the fire of heaven – like those Elijah stories that are told and retold.

Right, well I found those people conspiring to arrest Jesus.

We struck a bargain – if I take them to Jesus, identity him with a kiss, they would give me 30 pieces of silver.

Sounded like a good deal then.
 I get to keep the silver, no matter what,
 But I will see Jesus release angels from heaven
 Take out enemies
 And then -set up a new Kingdom – a Kingdom of
 God no less

We would see nothing LESS THAN THE
 POWER OF GOD.

Big problem – Jesus did not do what I expected him
 to do.

When I kissed him in the Garden – he just stood
 there.

He did not protest, fight or run off.

He did not say to any of us – cover me; I am going
 to make a break farther into the garden

And any of us could have helped him escape –
 darkness has a way of hiding things – why

Stranger, I did not even know you were there,
 Until you were almost on top of me.

But NO

Jesus just let thing happen

The phrase that comes to mind – *like a lamb to
 the slaughter.*

Here I thought when I greeted Jesus with a Holy
 Kiss, this would be the cue – Time to unleash the
 power of God!!

Whoosh and our enemies here and elsewhere
would be vaporized!!

But no, do you want to know what Jesus'
response was – **Friend, do what you came for...**

No thunder from heaven, no avenging angels, no
whoosh

Only sound was the Temple thugs coming
forward to stand between Jesus and the rest of us.
They bind his hands and march him off to who
knows where

What a mess!

What am I do to?

Stranger – though I should call you friend, because
you have listened to me – still want the 30 pieces of
silver you have been eyeing for a long time.

Here – it's yours

It's the money the priests paid me to set Jesus up
You can have it – I don't want it

Blood money you say – that's what the priests
called it when I tried to give it back to them
Here, take it – buy something, give it away to
another – I don't want it.

No...well I'll put it back in my purse,
Even though the finances of the group are a dead
issue – dead issue (hahaaa!

Nothing matters anymore friend
I have done a horrible thing.
I have made a terrible miscalculation...

*You think you hear a noise behind you and
 Judas – you turn around and there is nothing there.
 You turn back and Judas has already moved off
 The night fog is now thick in the garden
 You can hear the clink of the coins and the padding of
 Judas' sandals on the gravel in the grassless areas
 BUT EVEN AS YOU STAND THERE, THE FOG IS
 INCREASING
 YOU WANT TO CALL OUT – BUT THE STORY
 YOU HAVE JUST HEARD HAS LEFT YOU
 SPEECHLESS.*

THE fog is making you even more anxious –
 Judas' story,
 Descending fog – combination makes you shiver
 You are eager not to *seek out this Judas.*
You want to be home, and to that you head.

*But not before you utter a prayer for the one who
 has told to you his story.*

It seems the *least* you can do
 For you wonder, where is this Judas going to go
 now

You wonder what he is going to do.

You wonder – truly, what has Judas done

.....

Pain and betrayal inflicted by people and situations
 over which we have no control is one thing.

Pain and betrayal inflicted by friends or loved ones
 is something much worse

It is therefore not surprising then that those who first wrote about the life of Jesus paint a very dark picture of Judas.

What he does is shameful...horrible actually.

Does his story of betrayal to Jesus have anything to say to us?

Is there any lesson we can take away from Judas' story as a disciple of Jesus?

I believe there is – Judas' story – particularly the sections of Matthew that Karenza read – shows very clearly the subtlety of wickedness.

If any of us still think that sin as the Bible defines it – driving wedges in our relationship with God, with others and within ourselves – is a time expired churchy word – --give your heads a proverbial shake!!

The end result of Judas' wickedness is clear in this morning's reading

But when or how it begins

The sinful thoughts or succumbing to temptation is much cloudier

Over the centuries, Biblical commentators from the church fathers onward have seen Judas as synonymous with cold, calculating and heartless.

One certainly cannot make light of Judas' action – he was wicked, nasty and treacherous

However, I believe that Judas did not SET OUT to be a calculating betrayer.

At the end,

- He tried to give back the 30 pieces of silver
- He was seized by remorse [Matthew 27:3]
- If Judas were pure evil, then why did he say to the chief priest and elders – **I have sinned; for I have betrayed innocent blood (Matt 27:4)**

These are words and actions of one who realizes that he is caught in a web of sin and wickedness from which there is no easy escape

Personally, I think Judas was trying to force Jesus into unleashing the forces of heaven upon the Romans.

When Judas saw the Kingdom of God only in those terms – worldly power and show – and he was not the only disciple so to do--his frustration with Jesus' apparent non action led farther down the road toward betrayal.

By the time he realized what he had done and its consequences – all Judas could say was –what have I done.

In this life, we all will face temptation.

James makes that clear in the other lesson
Karenza read.

And note, one is never tempted by God says
James –

But, and this really important because it is so
unnervingly true.

**¹⁴ But one is tempted by one's own desire, being
lured and enticed by it; ¹⁵ then, when that desire
has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin,
when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.**

16th Century, protestant Reformer Martin Luther
once said

*Temptations, of course, cannot be avoided, but
because we cannot prevent the birds from flying
over our heads, there is no need that we should let
them nest in our hair.*

Wickedness and sin are very subtle

We can be drawn into,

Become involved in them before know it – without
on the one hand vigilance on our part

and on the other clinging to the presence of the
Risen Christ.

Judas let the “temptations” nest.

Let his example be a warning to each and
everyone of us.

The temptations of this life are always with us,
But the love, grace, mercy and forgiveness of God
lived out and applied liberally everyday WILL

PREVENT these temptations from gaining a firm foothold in our lives or to use Luther's analogy, prevent them from nesting. AMEN