

THE SUICIDE OF JUDAS
Third in a Sermon Series on Judas Iscariot --Matthew 27: 1-10 --February 19, 2012
The Church of the Covenant

To review –Judas as a Zealot has a political agenda and is attempting to force the hand of Jesus to declare Himself Messiah and to throw out the hated Romans. So he goes to the priests seemingly to betray his Master but really to press Jesus to do what Judas wants Him to do. He is told by Jesus at the Last Supper –“*What you are going to do, do quickly*”, and perhaps even thinks Jesus is in favor of his plot. So he goes to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, as Jesus is praying and seeks to point out Jesus as the One to arrest by giving Him a kiss. Jesus says: “*Judas, will you betray the Son of man with a kiss?*” (Luke 22: 48) And in this instant it is then that Judas realizes this plan of his has gone terribly wrong, it is spinning out of control, and what he had intended is not what is unfolding. Rather, what he has just done is to betray his Master and friend, the One who is Messiah and Lord. Judas, by betraying Jesus has just betrayed the Son of God.

How can he fix this? How can he take back his act of betrayal? How can he start over again? It seems hopeless. It seems impossible. What Judas has done he cannot now undo. It seems desperate. It seems awful in its finality. He has just committed the unspeakable. He has just brought condemnation, judgment and opprobrium down upon his own head. “O, that I might not have been given that morsel of bread by the hand of my Master as the sign of betrayal”, he must think. “O, that I might not have concocted this terrible plot.” “O, that I might have not gone to the high priests.” “O, that I might not have tried to betray my best friend with a kiss.” What have I just done? Lord, what have I done?

So he runs to the high priests hoping to set it aright. He sees that Jesus has been “*condemned*” to be put to death. So as the scripture says he “*repented*” (Matthew 27: 3), brings back the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders and says –“*I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.*” (v. 4) He has come back to try to set straight what his actions of have put into motion. Perhaps if he recants his betrayal the priests will let his Master live. “*What is that to us?*” they say coldly and then add “*See to it yourself.*” And they offer him the suggestion that he needs to take care of matters himself, perhaps set matters straight by taking his own life. So Judas throws down the 30 pieces of silver, so small a price for his own immortal soul, and as it says: “*he departed, and he went and hanged himself.*” (Matthew 27: 5) Judas, just as he had taken care of it himself in attempting to force the Master’s hand, now takes care of it himself, understanding the enormity of what he has done, and he goes out and takes his own life. Would that he had not taken care of it himself, but allowed God to take care of it from the beginning.

I break into the middle of this story of Judas with a comment on suicide. As Protestants we do not believe that taking one’s own life consigns one to hell. We understand the troubled nature of a person who takes their own life. We understand they are not thinking right; the most basic human instinct is to live and so their thought processes are so skewed that it overrides the fervent desire in the human heart to live. They may well believe that their death will not be noticed; that the world will not know or care. Trust me, as a pastor I have seen the devastating impact of when someone chooses to take their own life. It is like the person takes out a big butcher knife and stabs everyone who loves them and cares for them in the heart, every day for the rest of their lives. Or perhaps the person thinks they are getting even somehow with people who have been cruel or mean to them. Trust me, as a pastor, the only people whom the act of suicide harms are the people who love and care for the person who has taken their own life. The mean and heartless people forget in a day and a half –but the people who love you have to deal with it for the rest of their lives. Why didn’t I see the person leading up to taking their own life? Why didn’t they tell me? There were signs –why didn’t I see? Why didn’t I intervene? The people

who love you and care shoulder a deep and awful guilt for the rest of their lives. The pain in your heart cannot be quieted by causing an unrelenting pain in the heart of those who love you. Where is the peace in that? Or perhaps some young person has a casual view of life as if it is just some video game where you can push the reset button and come back to life. Not so, it takes away the precious gift of life and there is no reset button once a life has been taken. Or perhaps it is that someone has done something they think is awful and terrible and they think somehow there is no forgiveness for them. There is no way to set things right. There is no going back; there is no forgiveness to be had for whatever they have done. All of these are wrong-headed thinking; thought processes not resting in reality. *“Father, forgive them...they know not what they do.”* Forgive them; they’re not thinking right.

Consider this –**Judas perhaps was the first disciple who really realized exactly who Jesus is.** Judas realized He was the Messiah and the Lord and indeed the Son of God. This then was the enormity of what he had done and the depths of his betrayal. Judas realized first who Jesus was. **But Judas did not realize that Jesus was fully willing and fully capable of forgiving even Judas for what he had done.** Jesus forgave the Romans who nailed the nails into His hands, would He not have also forgiven Judas? Jesus forgave the disciples who, as the scripture said, “all fell away”, the shepherd was struck down and the sheep fled; EVERY disciple betrayed Jesus; EVERY disciple fell away, not just Judas. Peter, the brashest and boldest of the disciples was to betray Jesus before the cock crowed; if Jesus could forgive Peter and the rest of the 12, could He not also have forgiven Judas? **Judas knew who Jesus was, but not what He could do.** The power in the blood of Jesus is immense and unstoppable; one minute, tiny, infinitesimal speck of the blood of Jesus has the mighty power to forgive the blackest of sins. An atom of the blood of Jesus makes the sinner clean; there is no sin committed that cannot be forgiven; nothing done that cannot be undone at the foot of the cross; no place too far to have run where the unconditional love of Jesus cannot find you; there is complete and utter restoration through the cross of Jesus Christ. Even what Judas did was forgivable. Even the pain in Judas’ heart could have been taken away and replaced by the love of Jesus. Even Judas was capable of being restored fully and completely by the blood of the cross. And if Judas...then why not you????????? Why not me?

Two voices in Judas’ head that day. **One voice was a condemning voice** –“See what you have done! For 30 pieces of silver I have bought your soul. You even attempted to betray Him with a kiss. All He ever did was seek to love you, Judas, but look at the mess you have done. It is hopeless. It is without redemption. What you have done is impossible to set right. Go, see to it yourself. The pain in your heart is too great. Jesus cannot forgive you, will not forgive you. Hopeless, all is lost. Death. Death and Death. It is better to take your own life than to live. “ The one voice condemned and chanted death, death and death. **But the other voice was a compassionate voice** –“Judas, you are my beloved child. You are the one sheep who has gone astray and I the Good Shepherd will find you and bring you home; you are the prodigal and I am your loving Father waiting to celebrate your return; you are the broken man by the side of the road and I am ready to minister to your broken body and the brokenness in your soul. No matter what you have done I can forgive. How many times will I forgive? –70 times 7. How powerful is my love for you? Powerful enough to forgive what seems the unforgivable. I speak life to you. I have come to bring LIFE and life abundantly. I have died that you might live. Live, live and live. My voice leads you to life and new life and abundant life and eternal life.” It is this second voice which is always the voice of Jesus. It is this second voice to which we must listen. He went to the cross, Judas, and said “Father forgive them...” that even you, Judas, might LIVE. Follow that voice, beloved, and you shall always live and never die. O, that we might hearken to His voice today! Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*

