

Pastor Paul Webber

Lent Rotation 2017

Matthew 26 & 27

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our meditation tonight is from the 26th and 27th chapters of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, and please rise as we hear these words in Jesus' name:

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

These are Your Words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by the Truth. Your Word is Truth. Amen.

Everyone has a price. For Judas Escariot, this price was 30 pieces of silver. That was how much it took for him to betray Jesus. In today's money, the thirty pieces of silver that Judas accepted in exchange for Jesus' life would be worth about \$600. As we hear that, I bet that we are all a little bit shocked. It only took \$600 to get Judas to betray his Lord. But we shouldn't be so shocked when we hear this, because I know that we have all betrayed Jesus for a lot less.

Every single time we have not stood up for the truth of God's Word, we have betrayed Jesus. Every time we have downplayed to others the importance of our Christian faith in our lives, we have betrayed Jesus. Every time we have known that something we wanted to do, or say, went against what Jesus tells us in the Bible Christians are supposed to say and do, but we did or said it anyway, we have betrayed Jesus.

You see, to betray Jesus doesn't mean, in the absolute most limited sense, that we have literally sold him out to the Pharisees. To betray Jesus means to deny him in any way, for any reason. So as we consider that Judas betrayed Jesus for the equivalent of \$600, instead of being shocked and ashamed of Judas for how unfaithful HE was, our honest reaction should be shock and shame for how much less it has taken to get us to betray Jesus many, many, times, in our lives. Everyone has a price.

The one who bribes us to betray our savior is always the devil. It is he who presents to us the choice of confessing Christ, or being able to continue to enjoy all of our earthly friendships. It is he who presents to us the choice of avoiding the awkwardness of having to explain ourselves to God and being able to avoid awkwardness with our unbelieving friends and relatives. It is he who presents to us the choice of remaining true to the guidance God gives to us in His law, or being able to act on the baser, more embarrassing, instincts of our old sinful natures.

Judas knew what He was doing. He knew that he was betraying Jesus into the hands of those who hated him. It is true that Judas probably didn't know what this would ultimately mean for Jesus, but that doesn't really matter. Judas betrayed Jesus. He showed the whole world what his price was, and he was then driven to despair when he saw what his having betrayed Jesus meant for Jesus, and himself, and for many other people.

When we consider how often and how cheaply we have betrayed Jesus, we too are driven to despair. What is wrong with me? Why have I done this great evil? Why have I knowingly betrayed Jesus, over, and over, and over again?

We aren't terrified by this only from these words that show us what happened to Judas. We also have Jesus' own words, as they are recorded in Revelation chapter 2. **“I know your tribulation and your poverty. . . Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**

Be faithful unto death. Well, that ship has sailed. It is so far gone that we can't even see it on the horizon. You would have to think that the only logical reaction to what we have done would be to copy Judas in what he did. Upon realizing that he had betrayed innocent blood, the MOST innocent blood, into suffering and death, Judas lost all hope and took his life. And honestly, if there was only the knowledge of our sins, losing all hope wouldn't be all that bad of an idea.

But there is always hope. There is always that light in the darkness. There is always that hand reaching down to pull you up, out of the pit of despair that you have dug for yourself with your sins.

It is true that Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. It is also true that we have betrayed Jesus for a lot less. But Jesus didn't have a price. At no point, from the moment of his birth through when he breathed his last on the cross was Jesus ever willing to betray the word and will of God for any price.

Jesus was so faithful, in fact; he was so willing to be faithful to God's Word, including everything it demanded of him, that instead of receiving a payment in exchange for righteousness, Jesus made the payment of his whole self, as St. Peter writes in His first Epistle: **you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.**

So obviously Jesus was better than you are. He was better than Judas, and than any other sinful person who has ever lived. But Jesus being better than us doesn't have to do only with his being a perfect man. It also has to do with him being God.

This is how the payment of His whole perfect self on the cross has been able to atone for the sins of the whole world--even that sin of Judas. When Jesus died on the cross, God died. The eternally begotten son of God, the 2nd person of the Trinity, ceased to be alive.

What this means is that the payment Jesus made, not accepted, but made on the cross to God the Father was so great that it can never be overcome by sin. No matter how bad you have been up to this point, and no matter how bad you or anyone else might be in the future, there is no single sin nor any number of years lived in sin which cannot be forgiven through faith in Jesus.

Judas lost faith. He assumed that what he had done was so bad that Jesus could never forgive him. But, Jesus could have and would have. And as an example think about how Jesus treated another disciple who betrayed him: Peter. On the evening of Maundy Thursday, Peter denied being Jesus' disciple, and even knowing Jesus, not once but three times. Peter, just as much as Judas, had betrayed Jesus.

But then, on the morning of Easter, what did the angel in the tomb say to the two mary's and salome: **Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."**

Tell the disciples and Peter. Peter was singled out by the angels because Jesus knew that he needed to be. Peter knew that he had betrayed Jesus, and he would have been just as right as Judas had been to question his eternal standing before God. That is why Jesus made sure to tell Peter, in no uncertain terms, that he had risen--that all of Peter's sins had been paid for.

In the same way, in His Gospel Jesus tells you that he has risen, that all of your sins have been paid for. It is true that, like Judas, you have sold Jesus out. For the sake of ease, or sinful lust, or even literally for money, you have been bribed to betray your savior. But the payment Jesus made was greater than all those that you have accepted.

And now, through the means of grace, the blood of Christ has swept into your heart like a massive tidal wave and has pulled out all of your sins. You don't have to fear your past sins. You don't have to wonder if what you have done in your life has been bad enough to forever cut you off from God's love.

When you are driven to despair over your sins, rush right back into the arms of Jesus. Hear his word of forgiveness. Receive the very same body and blood with which he paid for your sins on the cross--and you will have what your sins and your own logic and reason can never give you. You will have peace--peace with God--the peace that can only come from the Gospel proclamation that Jesus Christ, the sinless son of God, **was delivered into death for our sins, and then rose to life for our justification.** Amen.