

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor  
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, March 31, 2019**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent/"People of the Passion"/Year C**  
**Primary Text: Luke 13:1-9**  
**Sermon Title: "The Disciples ~ Peter & Judas"**

## **Theme**

*The Gospelers can't agree on who the authentic Twelve were, but that matters little during the Passion. Two of Jesus' disciples have pivotal roles – **Judas and Peter**. Today we will quickly look at the disciples generally, but more specifically at Judas and Peter.*

## **Text**

<sup>12</sup>Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup>And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: <sup>14</sup>Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, <sup>15</sup>and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, <sup>16</sup>and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

## Sermon

It is a misnomer to entitle this sermon, "The Disciples" because I will only be talking about two of the most involved in the Drama of the Passion, Peter and Judas.

Peter has a significant role in almost any Gospel story and that is because he distinguished himself as a prominent disciple early on in Jesus' public ministry. A contemporary of Jesus Christ, he is thought to have been born around 1 BC and that is close enough to say that he and Jesus were probably close in age. Peter however, lived an unusually long time for men of that era. It is Christian tradition history that at an age between 64 and 68 years old, he was martyred by crucifixion, nailed to a cross upside down, because he thought of himself as unworthy of being crucified in the same manner that his Lord was.

Originally a fisherman by trade, Peter played a leadership role among the disciples and was known for often being the first one to speak and often not thinking about what he was going to say before he said it.

Peter was one of three, along with James and John, who formed Jesus' inner circle of closest disciples, witnessing certain events that the rest would only hear about, such as the Transfiguration.

According to the Gospels, it was Peter who confessed Jesus as the Messiah when Jesus asked all the disciples who they thought he was. But he was also the one who tried to upbraid Jesus for speaking about his own demise, and the disciple who initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet. For both of these faux pas, he earned a scolding from Jesus.

More specifically pertaining to the Passion, it was at the Passover table when Jesus told the Twelve that they would all become deserters, and specifically to Peter Jesus said,

Luke 22:31-34 Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, <sup>32</sup>but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." <sup>33</sup>And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!" <sup>34</sup>Jesus said, "I

tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me."

Of course, we know that what Jesus prophesied was exactly what came to pass. Later on that infamous night that Jesus was betrayed, Peter did indeed deny being one of Jesus' disciples, and more than that, he denied even knowing Jesus. According to the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 22:60-62 At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. <sup>61</sup>The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." <sup>62</sup>And he went out and wept bitterly.

But on the other side of Sunday, the resurrected Jesus gave Peter a special opportunity to redeem himself by asking him three times if he loved him. It appears to me that Peter was frustrated by the repeated question, but I think Jesus needed Peter to know his denial was in the past and there was Easter work to be done.

Full of the love and grace of his Lord, Peter did become the preeminent one who seemed to step up and lead the apostolic movement, first by preaching in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, and then by leading and giving shape to the early Christian movement that has survived to our day.

Yes, I think we can all relate to Peter. Perhaps his mistakes are recorded for eternity to demonstrate for us that we too can be used of the LORD. We don't have to be perfect, we just have to be willing to be used.

Moving on to Judas, I want to tell you in advance that I hold some untraditional views of him that will likely cause you to think and reconsider what you thought you know.

To set the stage for Judas to enter the drama of the Passion, we need to remind ourselves that in order for God revealed in Jesus Christ to save humanity from its sinful self, Jesus Christ, God's lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, will have to die.

I would also like to remind us of our sinful human nature. We like to have someone else to blame for bad things that happen. And when we do that, we absolve

ourselves from guilt that is rightly ours. So, as I have said before, if we try to answer the question, "Who killed Jesus?" there are several people we can name who were literally involved in his death, and Judas is one of them, but we know or should know, that it is our willful involvement in sin that made Jesus' crucifixion necessary.

We know little about Judas. We don't know when he was born or whether he was younger or older than Jesus. But we do know when he died, and that was just before Jesus was crucified.

As I said, it is human nature to like to have someone else to blame for bad things that happen. You may think this is heretical, but in my opinion, the Gospellers are guilty of redacting history. When they wrote down the names of the original disciples, Judas is listed but often times with the additional identification as "the one who would betray the Lord", or "the one who used to steal from the common purse." But seriously, if they knew he was a thief, why didn't they or Jesus call him out on it? The fact is, Jesus called the Twelve and I cannot believe that he called one that would be such a poor disciple. And by the way, there is an apocryphal book from antiquity that claims Judas was the most faithful of the Twelve because he was called upon to do such a heinous thing.

And while none of us wants to say it, I will, in order for Jesus Christ to die on the cross, someone had to kick the Drama of the Passion off and betray him and that task was given to Judas. There is even a school of thought out there that would indicate that Jesus asked Judas to betray him. I have no opinion on that, but I do think that is conceivable that in the same way John the Baptist was used by God in a mighty way to precede the Messiah, Judas might have been used by God in a mighty way to facilitate his crucifixion and therefore our salvation.

You will remember that John the Baptizer was almost robotic in his faithfulness, not caring what anyone else thought. I could see that Judas might have been used in the same way, just doing what the Spirit led him to do.

And speaking of John the Baptizer, we can be guilty of thinking that he had it all figured out and lived a faithful life till it's end, but do you remember the story of John rotting in prison sending a message to Jesus asking him if he is the one, the messiah, or was he to expect someone else?

You see, I think that even John expected another kind of messiah – one who was a military political leader who would run the Gentiles out of town and return Israel to the glory days of King David. That's what the crowd proclaimed on Palm Sunday – but that is a story for next week.

He, Judas had walked with Jesus for three years. He saw firsthand the power that he had. When Jesus sent the disciples out on the two missionary trips without him Judas was among the ones who came back full of the Spirit for all that they were able to accomplish in his name. Judas knew Jesus, and maybe he, like John, was just disappointed that Jesus was not being the kind of Messiah he wanted. Maybe Judas thought, "I'll just give him a nudge. When he gets painted into a corner, the real Jesus I know will show up." Maybe Judas was a patriot you see!

I don't know. Take whatever opinion you want. It doesn't change anything. We are still sinners, in need of a savior. Somehow Jesus had to die to accomplish his mission and Judas is the one we like to blame – but the guilt is ours.

And we continue the blame game when we debate Judas' eternal destination. As we know, out of great remorse for his actions, Judas hung himself, and bad ancient theology would indicate that if it wasn't bad enough that he betrayed Jesus and that led to his death, then surely his suicide sentenced him to hell because suicide is the one unforgiveable sin. Again, no Christian theologian believes that anymore.

Now, don't go away from here telling people your pastor doesn't believe the Bible. We Lutherans consider it the "inspired word of God" and by that we mean that it tells us what God wants us to know. I believe that. Each of the Gospel accounts are slightly different. That doesn't make one right and another wrong. They were written to a specific audience with the writer's specific agenda.

It is our job to fuss with it and to get at its deeper truth, and I further believe that these stories might exist for just such a conversation as this and for our mindful consideration, because God delights in our attention, and our meditation. So I feel no pressure to tell you what is right, my job is to draw you closer to God, who is jealous for your attention.

Now as you know, I have lead a study on this same issue two times before this sermon is preached and it is through those discussions that great conversations

ensue, questions are asked, and insight is given. So I would like to share that with you.

One question that came up is, "Will we see Judas in heaven or hell?" Well I don't plan on seeing him in hell! I think the question really is, "how will he be rewarded for the role he played?"

I don't know, I'm not judge, but from the cross Jesus said, "Father for....." Do you think that Judas is the one whose sin is greater than all others?

Another question that bubbled up as a result of the first installment of the People of the Passion, the role of Satan, Sin and Evil, is, "Was Judas' betray evil?"

I do have an opinion on this. Personally, yes, I think Judas' betrayal was evil. But as we discussed four weeks ago, with the story of the Joseph and his jealous brothers who sold him into slavery, doing evil does not make one an evil person. And God can use what was determined for evil, to do good.

So, before we go thinking that Judas somehow upset another plan that God had and that he therefore caused Jesus' death against the will of God, let me ask you this, do you think for a minute that that is possible? That the plan of the God of the universe could be thwarted by one rogue disciple? NO! <sup>John 3:16</sup>For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. That was, and is, and will always be God's plan.

And from the Second Reading for today, Paul wrote, <sup>2 Corinthians 5:18-19</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.

One person sent me an email regarding this study and came to this conclusion:

"It seems to me like Judas, despite performing one of the most terrible acts of betrayal in history, repented and was ultimately forgiven by Christ. If God can forgive the man who betrayed Him and started the process that lead to His death, surely all of us can be forgiven for our sins through repentance. I think the story of Judas is ultimately an example of the grace and love of God. No matter how badly we've been led astray, there is still hope for repentance, redemption, and forgiveness." Well said.

In conclusion, allow me to say that when we pin the blame for the crucifixion of Jesus on the action of one or a group *back then*, then we take ourselves off the hook, and the Drama of the Passion ceases to be the greatest love story ever told; the story about God's great love for you and me, and turns it into the senseless betrayal by one that lead to murder. That is not what happened and to *not* be clear about that makes liars out of us and a joke out of Jesus, his Passion, and God's love for us.

I think, if I have your head spinning and you are questioning everything you thought you knew, then my job here is done, and God is delighting in your attention.

### **Prayer**

Mysterious God, your great love for us is indeed a mystery. As we fuss with who did what and why, turn our thinking back to you and your great love for us, and faithful obedience of your Son and our Lord Jesus. It truly is all about you. We thank you, in Jesus' holy name. Amen