

THE HANDS OF THE PASSION¹

Hands of Betrayal

In the name of Jesus, the Friend of sinners, dearly redeemed:

Here's a question to ponder: How many sinners have been saved from destruction by this story of Judas? Only God can know for sure, but there was a Treasurer in a Lutheran church years ago who could have been. Not someone I ever met, just heard the story. Did his **Betrayal** start off with good intentions? Like so many who have sincerely said over the years, "Pastor, I wish I could do more for the church"? For whatever reason, he got into gambling, maybe kept looking for the big win that would make everything right, the big payback for the church and all his sleepless nights. But when his crime of embezzlement finally came to light, his good name died with his marriage and loss of freedom.

Betrayal is a common theme in the Bible. Jesus quotes from a Psalm of David: "*Even a man who was at peace with me, a man whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has raised up his heel to step on me.*" (Psalm 41:9 EHV) It's been said that from the time David dropped Goliath to his dying breath, David's life was filled with more drama than *Game of Thrones*. The first King Saul tried to kill him. David's sons schemed to steal his throne. His best general Joab plotted with David's son Ahithophel after killing another son of David to end Absalom's rebellion. David knew the sudden burn of **Betrayal**, the intense pain that scalds the soul. And now Jesus was feeling it with Judas.

Since the 1940's, how many moms and dads who want to name their boys "Adolf"? Since Bible times, do you find the name of "Judas" in those prize lists for new baby bundles? Seriously, it makes people wonder whether some guys and gals just come out of the womb corrupt. Or can they find a way to blame the fathers? The old nature / nurture question.

You know that's not a question in the Bible. David himself confessed, "*Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me.*" (Psalm 51:5 EHV) If that was true for David, a man after the Lord's own heart, how about us?

Judas' history with Jesus was dropping clues and warnings all along. Maybe you remember Mary anointing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume? Worth a year's wages! Judas argued the perfume could have been sold to help the poor. What a hypocrite! John reports: "*He did not say this because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief. He held the money box and used to steal what was put into it.*" (John 12:6 EHV) See, Judas did not just wake up some morning and decide, "I think I'll betray Jesus." No, he had a secret sin that he kept feeding instead of forsaking. He never came to Jesus and confessed the sins of his heart, that green-eyed greed that grows so lush in America too. His fellow disciples could have helped by giving the treasurer's job to someone else or having an extra counter checking the balance. Sin unchecked will always corrode the soul like rust that keeps eating deeper into unprotected steel.

Jesus knew. *By the time the supper took place, the Devil had already put the idea into the heart of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus....Jesus was troubled in his spirit and testified, "Amen, Amen, I tell you: One of you will betray me." The disciples were looking at each other, uncertain which of them he meant.*" (John 13:2,21f EHV) What thoughts started spinning through their minds as each kept saying, "*Surely you don't mean me, Lord?*" (Matthew 26:22) They all had argued about who was the greatest, right after Jesus foretold His betrayal, execution and resurrection. (Mark 9:31-34) Peter wasn't the only one insisting on his own loyalty to Jesus. Were they asking, "Am I capable of this?"

¹ Adapted from NPH 2021 Lent: *The Hands of the Passion* by Adam Mueller and Steven Pagels.

Well, are you? What secret sins do you have hiding in your heart? Have you ever sold God out for money or for a few minutes of pleasure? What secret sins have gone unrepented and unchecked for so long that scars have grown on your faith that keep you from holy fear? Is greed the sin that's crouching at your heart's door? Does the devil wave some secret sin in your face to bring you to your knees in shame? What good will the example of Judas do for any of us if we can only say what a bad guy he was?

Any of us are capable of soul destroying, life corroding sin if left unchecked. The Bible teaches how to help each other here. ***“Brothers, if a person is caught in some trespass, you who are spiritual should restore such a person in a spirit of humility, carefully watching yourself so that you are not also tempted.”*** (Galatians 6:1 EHV) ***“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his sin just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have regained your brother.”*** (Matthew 18:15 EHV)

True to His Word, Jesus tried to reach Judas like a pastor seeking out to a straying member. At least three times Jesus confronted Judas in the hearing of the Twelve. After Jesus' Bread of Life Discourse he asked, ***“Did I not choose you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” He meant Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, one of the Twelve, because Judas was going to betray Jesus.***” (John 6:70f) Just minutes before our text right after Jesus washed His disciples' feet, including those of Judas, Jesus said, ***“You are clean, but not all of you.”*** (13:10) Now right there at the Passover table Jesus dips His holy, innocent hands in the bowl with Judas **Hands of Betrayal**. How much more kindly could the Lord Christ reach out, pleading beyond words, “Resist Satan! Don't do it!”

“As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do more quickly.” (John 13:27 EHV) God's timetable for our salvation was moving much faster than any intelligence on earth or in heaven or hell could imagine. ***As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.*** In the Garden of Gethsemane Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

Yet that was not the worst **Betrayal** for Jesus. From His parched lips He would cry out from the worst **Betrayal** of all: ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Mark 15:34 EHV) God treated His own Son as though He had committed Judas' **Betrayal** or turned traitor like Ahithophel and Joab. God banished Christ to suffer hell's punishment for our sins of greed, our idols loving money, our thick headed self-righteousness, and for every embarrassing secret sin our hearts try so hard to hide. All have been punished. All paid in full. ***“By his wounds we are healed.”*** (Isaiah 53:5).

And that's what makes the ending of Judas so tragic. His sin was no worse than Peter's denial or the rest of the disciples desertion when Jesus needed them most. Sin is sin, and sinners sin. So the real tragedy is when sinners see their lost condition and then despair, as if God can only pay them back for sin. Or the arrogance of thinking their sins are more powerful than God's grace and mercy. “Remorse” is a buzz-word when media report crimes, but mere “remorse” can only end in death. Like Ahithophel centuries before him, Judas took his own life in his last act of despair, suicide. The Holy Spirit tells us that Judas ***“went to his place”*** (Acts 1:25), which wasn't heaven. But it could have been.

There's one more miracle the dear Holy Spirit wants to work in us tonight. Along with honesty about our hearts, He wants us to see the honest love of God. Judas, like Peter, could have spent the rest of his life telling everyone who would listen how Jesus' blood washes away all sin, yes, even mine! Don't ask how God could forgive a traitor like Judas. Ask, “How could God love and forgive a traitor like me?” And revel in the priceless answer: In Christ alone. Yes! In Christ alone. Amen.