

Whom Shall We Follow?

I don't know about you, but I can count on one hand the number of sermons I have heard (or preached) about Judas, probably with a few fingers missing.

And those sermons that have been preached about him seem to boil down to a few similar takes on why Judas did what he did.

He's a cowardly traitor.

Or he's a greedy gold-digger who figures the other side is the winning side.

And sadly, over the course of too many centuries of vicious anti-Semitism that has polluted Christianity, Judas was even held up as the whipping boy for the entire Jewish people.

On a kinder note, some scholars now argue that Judas and Jesus actually planned it all!

That Judas simply did what Jesus asked him to do in securing his arrest.

And yet, perhaps what motivated Judas was something beyond greed or treachery or even loyalty.

Perhaps what pushed Judas to do what he did was something so deeply rooted in what it is to be human, that we all of us spend a lifetime grappling with it.

Perhaps what Judas was really motivated by wasn't greed or weakness of character, or even a secret pact with Jesus, but by his inability to surrender control.

Perhaps he, like me, and perhaps like some of you, could not fathom the notion that somehow God can create joy and peace and the beloved community out of something as strange as letting go of control.

That love of enemies rather than revenge, that walking the extra mile rather than insisting upon my just rewards, that turning the other cheek and giving the other gal the benefit of the doubt, that a life lived this way really is the path to a life that is full.

Judas, like me, and perhaps like some of you, thought he knew better.

Of course we need massive military budgets!

A fat retirement portfolio!

Security gates around our upper middle-class neighborhoods!

And low taxes for the rich!

These are the essentials to a life worth living!

Judas, like me, perhaps like some of you, knew that only in this way do we find peace, joy, and community.

Of course it tends to be the peace of an empire safeguarded by nuclear weapons.

It tends to be the joy that is fulfilled by biting into a fat saturated Big Mac.

It tends to be a community in which everyone looks, thinks, and talks, just like me.

What Judas misses, what I so often miss, is that God wants so much more for us.

Maybe what we need to see in Judas is the incarnation, the embodiment, of "the world" that Jesus keeps referring to over and over in today's gospel lesson.

This gospel lesson, so much like a quiet murmuring, a longing lullaby, that Jesus is sharing with the Father.

You have to wonder whether it should be sung to really get to its depths?

For in this quiet meditation, Jesus contrasts "the way of the world" with "God's way."

He prays that the apostles will choose surrender over control.

Release over recrimination.

Peace over power.

Judas chooses control, recrimination and power, and nothing ends well for him.

Today particularly we have an urgent need to come to grips with the way of Judas — and the way of Jesus.

Now more than ever, as our modern, sophisticated, western society stands at the brink of worldwide disaster caused by 200 years of industrialization, we might ask: whose way shall we follow?

For 200 years we have turned figuring out how to control people, places and things into its own religion.

Our modern economies depend on using the planet as an unending source of ever greater exploitation.

And those economies have become a merciless juggernaut in bringing us to this current place of peril due to climate change.

Climate change that humanity is directly responsible for.

Climate change that may very well bring about, if not our complete demise, then at least immense suffering.

Remarkably, even now, we continue to drag our feet in taking the steps necessary to curtail its worst consequences.

Some of that foot dragging is caused by willful ignorance.

It's ironic to the point of laughing out loud (if not crying) when we hear certain social commentators talk about how our current American civilization was created from a blank slate, thereby falsely dismissing the thousands of years in which Indigenous people lived in these lands.

In harmony with nature.

Sustaining it.

Nurturing it.

And passing it down from generation to generation.

Always in better shape than they found it.

Yet, in a mere 200 years, Western man, (and it is most definitely "man"), has created a throwaway society geared toward consumption, the pillaging of natural resources, and an addiction to ever expanding growth.

As here we stand — at the precipice of catastrophe.

And the question becomes quite urgent: will we continue on the road that leads to suicide on a mass scale?

The road Judas took?

Or will we embrace the life giving way of Jesus?

The way that favors the outcast and prisoner?

The way that is kind to the check-out guy at the local grocery?

The way that chooses to die rather than kill?

The way that stops to chat with a lonely person?

The way that structures our economy in a way respectful of, and caring toward, those future, unborn generations?

Requiring a radical shift from growth to stability.

From consumption to preservation.

From waste to renewal.

Which requires from all of us a drastic change in how we see the world, and ourselves.

A metanoia.

A change of consciousness.

And that very change of consciousness, which leads to life rather than death, is beautifully set out in this morning's reading from Acts.

It's on display in the way in which the new apostle was chosen, the one needed to replace Judas.

They draw lots!

And while some folks may think that God is putting her hand on the scales, that God nudges the dice, that he selects heads or tails, that she is the author of chance — maybe something else is happening here.

Maybe this choosing by lots is trying to tell us, **not** something about God, but is trying to tell us something about ourselves.

Because choosing by lots means neither man controls his destiny.

He's not giving a speech about why he's the right choice.

No letters of recommendation come flooding in.

Instead, the one who is chosen and the one who isn't come to see that the choice has nothing to do with their deserving something, earning something, or being entitled to something.

Both the one who is chosen and the one who isn't come to see that they have no control over the matter.

And that whether they are chosen or not, going forward and living life in a way that is free of the need to be in control, why, that's the path that they're each called to walk.

Whether or not they are given the title of Apostle.

Isn't that the question the story of Judas asks each of us today?

"Who am I following?"

Judas?

Or Jesus?

Let us pray.

“Loving God, you fill all things with a fullness and hope that we can never comprehend.

Thank you for leading us into a time where more of reality is being unveiled for us all to see.

We pray that you will take away our natural temptation for cynicism, denial, fear and despair.

Help us have the courage to awaken to greater truth, greater humility, and greater care for one another.

May we place our hope in what matters and what lasts, trusting in your eternal presence and love.

Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our suffering world.

Help us to be the change your creation cries out for.

We offer these prayers in all the names by which you Lord are known.”
R. Rohr, modified.

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