

**Sermon**  
**April 18, 2019**

**Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Zeta T. Lamberson**

**One of You**  
**Matthew 26:14-30, 47-56**

Leonardo da Vinci's famous fresco *The Last Supper* has sealed forever in our minds a visual interpretation of the events of this night. At the long table we find Jesus in the center surrounded by the twelve disciples. The disciples are all seated on one side of the table grouped in threes. One of the trios contains Judas, Peter and John. Out of all that scripture recalls that Jesus taught at table Leonardo da Vinci chose to portray specifically the reaction to Christ's words that "*one of you*" - one of the twelve disciples - would betray him. What we see when we study this painting closely is how da Vinci imagined all twelve reacting to the news with different degrees of horror, anger and shock. For although we know who the one is that will betray Jesus - or the two actually for Peter also denied knowing Jesus - the disciples did not know who Jesus was talking about.

We can identify with the disciples for when we hear Jesus' words "*Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me*" we too become distressed. We cannot imagine it. In this the inner circle of disciples - those who had been called into a special relationship with Jesus, those who had sat at Jesus' feet for his entire ministry and heard his teachings. Those who had witnessed his many healings, seen his compassion, been gifted with his power and sent out to proclaim the good news and heal in his name. Among these Jesus says there is one who will betray him - there is always one in the crowd we might say. But we still find it hard to believe. And yet all four gospels relay this story.

We do not know much historically about Judas except for what scripture tells us. But scholars have tried to figure out what motivated him for years. We just need to know why? Some think he was motivated by greed since he was identified as the treasurer of the group and did take money for his betrayal. Others think he was frustrated that Jesus wasn't changing the world fast enough and thought he could push Jesus into action. The truth is we do not know why Judas decided to betray Jesus. But

the facts are clear. He did. And in our passage this night there are at least three things Judas did that give us some clues about who he was.

Judas went on his own to the chief priests and asked “*What will you give me if I betray Jesus to you?*” This was premeditated. He thought about it and made a decision and then acted upon that decision. He wanted something for his actions and he knew they were desperate enough to pay him. They offered thirty pieces of silver. Friends, that was not a lot of money. But a figure that is found in other places in scripture and give us some clues about its worth in biblical times. It was the exact price paid to the master of a slave if and when his slave was gored by an ox according to Exodus. (Exodus 21:32). In Zechariah thirty pieces of silver was the amount given to the prophet after his work as a shepherd. He went to those he worked for and asked them to pay him what they thought he was worth. They gave him thirty pieces of silver, which he sarcastically called a “handsome price” because it was such a small amount (Zechariah 11:13). This was not a large ransom paid to fill Judas’ pockets but a token. But maybe Judas felt it was what the information was worth for he took the money. He wanted something for his efforts - maybe needed something to justify his actions.

And then Judas went and joined Jesus and the other disciples in the upper room at table watching and waiting for the opportune moment. We imagine he was trying to act normal until Jesus surprised them all by saying that one of them would betray him. Leonardo da Vinci depicted Judas in shadow, looking rather withdrawn and taken aback by the sudden revelation of his plan. He is the only disciple in the painting with his elbow on the table maybe trying to look nonchalant. Seen clutching a small bag his head is the lowest of anyone in the painting. You get the feeling that he was trying not to react and yet his words give him away. For the other disciples respond “*Surely not I, Lord?*” and that is the response we remember when we think of this story. But Judas said something slightly different in Matthew’s account. He said “*Surely not I, Rabbi?*” Both Lord and Rabbi are terms of respect and honor but in Matthew Rabbi was a negative term. Just two weeks ago we heard Jesus tell the disciples

not to use the term rabbi. And in Matthew Judas is the only person who called Jesus Rabbi and only twice - both in our passages this night. Whether consciously or not Judas revealed in his reply that he did not have the same respect for Jesus and his teachings as the other disciples had. Maybe he couldn't bring himself to call Jesus Lord after he had betrayed him to the Sanhedrin.

And finally, when the meal was over and Jesus and the disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane Judas must have slipped away seeing his opportunity. He knew where Jesus would be for the night and that it was a secluded spot. This was perfect and he needed to get this over with. He went to the authorities and led them to where Jesus was. They came with swords and clubs like they expected resistance. Judas had told them how they would know who to arrest. Judas would greet him with a kiss. And not only did he kiss him but once again he acknowledged Jesus saying "*Greetings, Rabbi.*" Jesus did not seem surprised. But the other disciples were. One drew a sword and struck the slave of the high priest cutting off his ear. Isn't it interesting that never before in all of Jesus' teachings do we hear of the disciples drawing a sword. Clearly their anxieties have been heightened - maybe they even thought they would have to fight one another. But Jesus stopped them. He would have no violence. The chief priests and temple leaders had many opportunities to arrest him before this moment but had waited and he would not resist now. For the time had come. And Jesus went peacefully with those who had come to arrest him.

Yes, Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver with a kiss and yet the words "*one of you will betray me*" haunt us to this day. And they must have haunted the other disciples later that night for the last words of our scripture reveal that after Jesus' arrest "*all the disciples deserted him and fled.*" When the heat was raised - when the time came to make a stand - they deserted him in fear.

Johann Sebastian Bach was struck by this fact. When he wrote his musical representation of the Passion story based on Matthew Bach wanted to accentuate this point. In other cantatas Judas' question to Jesus was always a solo for Judas was an individual. But Bach did something different.

He had the whole chorus instead sing that guilty question, *“Is it I, Lord?”* For my friends, the truth is that if we are honest we are all guilty of betraying our Lord at some time in our lives. And on this night above all nights we come face to face with that fact.

And yet, the saddest part of Judas’ story is not that he betrayed Jesus. That was bad but we are all guilty of having betrayed Jesus at some time. It is what Judas chose to do when faced with that reality that grieves us. Judas must have followed Jesus and the mob back to the High Priest’s house. He like Peter stood in the shadows watching what would happen. He might have been hoping Jesus would resist or perform a miracle once again and get away. He must have believed Jesus would stop what was happening before it went too far. But when he saw that Jesus was condemned he knew he had made the wrong decision. Scripture tells us he repented and was brave enough or desperate enough to go back to the chief priests and the elders to return the thirty pieces of silver. He confessed his sins looking for repentance. And yet his offer was rejected. There was no grace to be found among the Sanhedrin. And in despair he went out and hanged himself. He could not live with what he had done. That is one of the reasons his betrayal has forever been remembered.

And yet, my friends, what we know is that if Judas could just have endured the next few days as Peter did after he denied knowing Jesus not once but three times; and as the other disciples who deserted Jesus did, another ending was possible. And that is what we come to remember and do this night. For what is possible for us as we gather at this table is possible for all who sin and fall short of the glory of God. For when we come to this table having confessed our sins the truth is revealed to us - through the body and blood of Christ. For through Christ’s death on the cross we have been offered a new life - a new beginning - a new start. But to experience that new life we must walk to the cross and beyond with Jesus. And so again this night we journey to the cross with our Lord and Savior.