

## Connections

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

John 17:6-19

You know, one fellow who gets almost zero air time during sermons is Judas.

He has his cameo on Palm Sunday, during the reading of the Passion, and frankly, there's so much going on that day that who has time to talk about Judas?

But here he is again today.

Oh, he's already dead, but our reading from Acts deals with the consequences of what Judas did, leaving that gap in the needed twelve apostles, a gap that is filled today.

So maybe today is a good day to spend some time with Judas.

Not that he's a pleasant subject, which is why I usually steer clear of him.

But I'm thinking there's more to Judas than first meets the eye.

I mean, the first impression most folks have of Judas is that he's a spineless sellout who gives up his best friend for a couple hundred bucks, or in Biblical terms, for thirty pieces of silver, but you get the idea...

Who wants to waste time on a greedy traitor?

But I have a feeling our first impression may miss the mark; and if we dig a little deeper, we might find ourselves face to face with a Judas who we don't like to talk about..... NOT so much because of who he is, but because of how he might remind us of who WE are.....

Judas Iscariot is the full name.

Iscariot being a name for dagger men — daggers the Jewish revolutionaries used against the Romans in the guerrilla war that is picking up steam during Jesus' ministry.

But what if Judas isn't motivated by greed or cowardice, but rather by something that tends to afflict me on a regular basis, and maybe it afflicts some of you too, from time to time?

That something is "doing things my way."

You see, rather than being a spineless coward, what if Judas is thinking that if Jesus is arrested, facing execution, well, maybe that will force God's hand?

Just like some of our fringe group Christian friends who are secretly hoping for nuclear war in the Middle East, so that God will be forced to intervene; and I quote:

"Millions of Americans believe that Christ will not come again until Israel wipes out its competitors and there is widespread war in the Middle East. Some of these folks want to start a huge fire of war and death and destruction, so that Jesus comes quickly." Posted on February 18, 2012 by WashingtonsBlog

So what if Judas helps set up Jesus — figuring that God will then have no choice but to step in and make all things kosher?

That's natural human thinking!

If your child or mine is in danger from some thugs, guaranteed we do all we can to save our child.

It's why Liam Nieson can make 10 sequels of his beat 'em up movie "Taken" and rake in millions each time: stepping in to save your kid is something we just DO!

So I'm wondering if Judas is thinking, God can be no different!

And that becomes the central problem for Judas, and it is the central problem for me, and maybe for some of you too.

We mix up "our ways" with "God's ways," imposing our best thinking on God, only to find ourselves ending up with egg on our face or just looking stupid, and sometimes we can even end up, like Judas, with blood on our hands.

The remedy for this great temptation to substitute “our ways” for “God’s ways” is given to us in today’s gospel lesson.

I have to say, I was sorely tempted to sing this gospel lesson to you today.

Alas, I am a coward and not a very good singer.

But today’s gospel really does need to be sung in order to be understood, and I urge you all, after the mass of course, to look at it again, and sing it to yourself.

Why?

Because this intimate prayer of Jesus this morning, if it’s just spoken, is very hard to follow.

Words loop around, the sentences are long and meandering, the effort to read it straight through can very well leave you shaking your head in confusion, if you’re able to pay attention at all.

But sung slowly, the profound depth of this heartfelt communion between Jesus and the Father comes through – for what we are witnessing is not logic or connecting the dots – we are eavesdropping on something that maybe reminds you of your first kiss; something that feels like that hour you spent long ago with your very best friend, sharing the deepest intimacies of your soul, and hearing the deepest intimacies of her soul.....

What Jesus invites us into, what Judas could not bring himself to do, is letting go of our will, letting go of our best thinking, and in the letting go, allowing ourselves to be consumed by the will of God.

Which doesn’t mean looking for a quick exit from the realities of this life – it doesn’t mean being transported into some pie in the sky in the sweet by and by.

When Jesus looks into heaven at the beginning of this gospel, he’s not looking into the faraway places: instead, he sees you in your everyday clothes, with your everyday problems, through heaven’s eyes.

He sees the immense beauty of creation as it is held together every moment of every day by the will, the breath, the delight of God.

A God who invites us to let our will, our desires, our hopes and dreams, come into alignment with God's.

And to learn that, what we need more than anything is each other.

Judas goes off on his crazy scheme all by himself — and we know how that turns out.

The other disciples, who aren't much more insightful or faithful than Judas; well, at least they hang together, and in the hanging together, find themselves in places of such monstrous grace, such cavernous hope, that they become, as we are invited to become, earthen vessels and wounded healers, in which the living, breathing, death-defying Holy Spirit comes and finds a home — and gives us our life.

It happens in community; not to lone rangers.

In a few minutes, we will baptize Kayla.

We don't baptize her so she can get a ticket into heaven.

We don't baptize her for just her own sake.

We baptize her so that she may claim full membership in this motley crew that we call the Body of Christ, and as we hope to enrich her life, so she will also enrich ours..

We baptize her so that with your presence and mine, she may grow up in a community of people who are bound and determined to practice, slowly and with many failures, but nevertheless, to practice — bending our wills to more nearly resemble the will of God....

We baptize her so that she may live into a life that is far more than logic or connecting the dots or earning a living.

We baptize her so that she may develop the eyes to see and the ears to hear the silent, yet deafening, the invisible, yet sometimes blinding, Mystery, that holds all things together.

Baptism is a commitment by and to community, for it is in this community where God takes each of us, with our talents and foibles, our loveliness and our smallness, transforming each and every one of us into the holy people we were meant to be from the very beginning.

Judas got caught up with a vision of how the kingdom of God might come to earth.

In Jesus, we learn that God's kingdom is already here, in the shining eyes of the little ones, in the daily service we give to one another, in the kindness and gentleness of strangers.

Lord, may your Holy Spirit dwell within us and among us that we might remember to hope in your word, to heed your instructions, to delight in your love.

+amen