## Judas Iscariot

 Six days before Passover Jesus went back to Bethany, where he had raised Lazarus from death. A meal had been prepared for Jesus. Martha was doing the serving, and Lazarus himself was there.

Mary took a very expensive bottle of perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. She wiped them with her hair, and the sweet smell of the perfume filled the house. A disciple named Judas Iscariot was there. He was the one who was going to betray Jesus, and he asked, "Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?" Judas did not really care about the poor. He asked this because he carried the moneybag and sometimes would steal from it. Jesus replied, "Leave her alone! She has kept this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me."

John 12: 1-8

## Background

Okay, okay, what does Judas have to do with being a faithful Christian? Well sometimes we learn by looking at opposites. Judas was a gifted and trusted disciple who made bad choices. We learn and grow by listening to his story

Judas is always placed last in a list of the disciples. He is described as “Iscariot” which could mean he came from Kerioth, a town in southern Judea. That would make him the only non-Galilean among the twelve disciples.

Judas was with Jesus from the very beginning. He was there at the wedding in Cana when Jesus turned water into wine. He saw his master feed five thousand from five loaves and two fishes. He witnessed a lame man walk and a blind man seeing. He was present when Jesus commanded Lazarus to rise from the dead.

Judas was never treated as an outsider during Jesus’ ministry. Judas held a position of prominence and trust as the group’s treasurer. So why did he betray Jesus? Here are a few possibilities:

1. Judas may have tried to force Jesus’ hand. The name “Iscariot” could also refer to the “Sicarii,” a Zealot partisan group opposed to the Roman government. This group challenged the Roman army at Masada forty years later. Possibly Judas was looking for a messiah like King David. Judas may have misunderstood Jesus’ teachings about God’s kingdom. Judas simply missed the big picture.
2. Judas may have been greedy. Admittedly, thirty pieces of silver was not a great sum. John states that Judas was a thief who regularly stole from the group’s treasury (John 12:6). Such acts were small bounty for betraying the world’s greatest treasure.
3. Judas may have been jealous of others. John was the “beloved disciple.” Peter, James, and John enjoyed special treatment. Jesus offered Judas honor and respect during the Last Supper (John 13:22-26). Judas’ was not satisfied. He left the meal early to betray his master.

## Reflections

Judas’s betrayal earned him the scorn of history. All four gospels vilify him. Dante’s *Inferno* states that the lowest levels of hell are reserved for those who are traitors to family, traitors to country, murderers of invited guests, and traitors to God (including Lucifer and Judas). We will never know Judas’ true motivations. We do know he followed his own agenda and failed to follow Christ.

In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus gathered his disciples for a special meal. Jesus washed everyone’s feet. Judas left to betray Jesus. He missed important teachings of the master:

* Jesus shared with his disciples the “Great Commandment’ (John 13: 31-35). Jesus said to love each other as God has loved us.
* Jesus declared that he was “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14: 6). Jesus shared salvation.
* Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 14: 15-29). God’s gift that brings heavenly power and peace.
* Jesus prayed for his disciples (John 17). This High Priestly Prayer was a special blessing for all who follow Jesus.

The name Judas actually means one who is “praised” or “celebrated.” Unfortunately, he did not live up to his good name. He only praised Jesus on his terms. The church sometimes has more to fear from insiders than from outsiders. Judas was the enemy from within. We should never lose sight of the fact that this is never our church. This is forever Christ’s’ church.

Judas had difficulty understanding the extravagance of God’s grace…

* When Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with expensive ointments, Judas complained of the great cost (John 12: 3-6).
* Jesus knew Judas’ transgressions and yet he lovingly called him, taught him, fed him, cleansed him, and even forgave him from the cross.
* Ironically, Judas was the only disciple to call Jesus “rabbi” in Matthew’s Gospel. Judas called Jesus his master but did not follow him.

Responsible Christians do not concentrate on themselves but on what God wants them to do. We openly pray the words “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” in the Lord’s Prayer. These words commit us to seeking the will of God and then doing it.

Judas left too soon to hear the words of the Great Commission. We have the opportunity to learn from his mistakes. Let us celebrate and share the love of God. Let’s forgive others, as we know that we too are forgiven. Let’s acknowledge forever the supremacy of God’s kingdom, power, and might in our lives. Amen.

## Questions

1. Richard of Chichester openly fought greed with a vow of poverty. He was known as the barefoot bishop who unselfishly cared for his flock. Consider his verses. Who should be first in our lives? How should we follow?

Day by day, dear Lord, of thee three things I pray:

To see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,

Follow thee more nearly, day by day. (1197-1253)

2. What can we do to help others have a closer walk with God?

3. Why should we always seek to please God and not just ourselves?

CHRIST washed the feet of Judas!

The dark and evil passions of his soul,

His secret plot, and sordidness complete,

His hate, his purposing, Christ knew the whole,

And still in love he stooped and washed his feet.

Christ washed the feet of Judas!

Yet all his lurking sin was bare to him,

His bargain with the priest, and more than this,

In Olivet, beneath the moonlight dim,

Aforehand knew and felt his treacherous kiss.

Christ washed the feet of Judas!

And so ineffable his love ’twas meet,

That pity fill his great forgiving heart,

And tenderly to wash the traitor’s feet,

Who in his Lord had basely sold his part.

Christ washed the feet of Judas!

And thus a girded servant, self-abased,

Taught that no wrong this side the gate of heaven

Was ever too great to wholly be effaced,

And though unasked, in spirit be forgiven.

And so if we have ever felt the wrong

Of Trampled rights, of caste, it matters not,

What e’er the soul has felt or suffered long,

Oh, heart! this one thing should not be forgot:

Christ washed the feet of Judas.

George Marion McClellan, 1860-1934