

Matthew 26:14-15; 27:3-5 - “Thirty Pieces of Silver”

Midweek Lent III - 2021

Our symbol for this evening is Thirty Pieces of Silver, which reminds us of the incident in our Gospel reading from Matthew: *“Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment [Judas] sought an opportunity to betray [Jesus].”*

The purpose of this evening’s sermon is not to try and figure out why Judas was disloyal and betrayed Jesus for Thirty Pieces of Silver (the price of a common slave). Instead, I want us first to be able to see ourselves in Judas, how we do the same thing. And second, I want us to see ourselves in Jesus Christ, so that we don’t, like Judas, despair of God’s love and ability to save us.

First of all we need to realize that whenever we sin we betray Jesus as our Savior—we are disloyal to Him and His will for our lives in preference for our own will. Hopefully we can all see ourselves in Judas since, if we don’t see ourselves as helpless sinners, we won’t see our desperate need for Jesus Christ as our help and salvation.

Let’s now consider what price we put on our sins of betraying Jesus. If we compare our text to our OT reading, about Joseph’s brothers selling Joseph into slavery for *“twenty shekels of silver,”* it sounds like the price of a slave, like most things, had gone up. But if we consider our own lives, unlike the cost of living in this world, the cost of betraying Jesus and dying has probably gone down.

You don’t have to be good at math to figure this out. All you have to do is consider what you hope to gain by sinning. A few moments of pleasure; a chance to look “cool” in the eyes of others; more creature comforts in this world? Whatever you hope to gain is your price for betraying Jesus.

The second part of our text says that, *“when Judas, [Jesus’] betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ They said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself.’ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, [Judas] departed, and he went and hanged himself.”*

Even though Judas was later sorry for what he had done, he soon learned that the guilt of sin was not so easily removed. Getting rid of the money didn't get rid of the sin or guilt. Sin demands a much higher price.

As we heard in our Epistle reading (Romans 6:20-23), "*The wages of sin is death.*" No one can pay for their sins by being sorry, by works of penance, or by a million good works. As we sang in our last hymn, "Not the labors of my hands can fulfill Thy laws demands; Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow, All for sin could not atone." The only payment is death, eternal death.

That's why the Gospel gives such immeasurable comfort for those who recognize the immeasurable price of their sin. While it's true that "*The wages of sin is death,*" it's also true that "*the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" "Thou must save, and Thou alone," and Jesus did through His death and resurrection. What a blessing it is for us sinners to not only hear but, by the grace of God, believe our Lord's words of absolution, "*I forgive you all your sins.*"

As our God and Savior, who drank the Cross in the Cup until it was "finished"—who paid for every last one of our sins through His death, He alone has the right to speak such words. And with the same power that created the heavens and the earth; the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, our Lord's words, "*I forgive you all your sins,*" like the crow of the rooster, announces a new day—a new beginning—a new life in us that is forever living instead in place of our old life that is forever dying.

In summary, what does God remind us of from through the Thirty Pieces of Silver? For one, He reminds us that the cost of sin is far and above whatever momentary pleasure we get from it. It's not worth it!

Second, if in the hour of trial you fall, as Judas did, the message of the cross reminds and empowers us not to follow Judas to the tree of despair, where he despaired of God's love and ability to save him and dealt with his sins his way, resulting in his eternal death. Instead, God, through the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection for our salvation, empowers us to follow Jesus to the tree of life—to despair of ourselves (repent of our sins and our ability to pay for them) and trust in God's work of salvation through our crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ, leading others to do the same.

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen