

**Sermon**  
**Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene**  
**Maundy Thursday**  
**April 2, 2026**  
**6:30 PM**

Text: John 13:21-32

Theme: Bless the Lives We Actually Have: Blessed Are the Guilty

“Do quickly what you are going to do.”

I imagine the scene as John describes it: a dimly lit room, a low-slung table set for the evening meal. Around its edges are gathered the disciples, Jesus on one side, the beloved disciple next to him. And opposite them, across the table, reclines Judas.

There is muted conversation. But Jesus is quiet, brooding. Until, suddenly, he speaks.

“Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me” (v. 21).

The room goes absolutely still and silent. The disciples are stunned. Our scripture tells us that Jesus was “troubled in spirit,” but the Greek literally means angry or indignant. His statement is harsh, sharp-edged. It pops the fraternal atmosphere of the room like a fragile soap bubble.

The beloved disciple is the first brave enough to break the silence. He tentatively asks the question that is on all their lips: “Lord, who is it?” (v. 25). And behind that question hovers another: *Is it me? Oh please, Lord, please do not say that it is me.*

Though the disciples will not understand, we know what’s coming, as Jesus dips a piece of bread in the wine, leans across the table, and hands it to Judas.

“Do quickly what you are going to do,” he says. And just like that, Jesus sets in motion his final hours on this earth.

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The drama of this scene revolves around that controversial figure Judas. We cannot seem to make up our minds what to think about him. He is at once notorious and sympathetic, the thrifty disciple who became the irredeemable pariah of our tradition. He's been called a thief, a spy, and a traitor who sold his Lord with a kiss for thirty pieces of silver (Matt 26:14). In Dante's *Inferno*, he is consigned to the lowest circle of hell for his treachery, and even Jesus refers to him as "a devil" (John 6:70-71) who would have been better off never being born (Mark 14:21; Matt 26:24).

And yet, the gospels do not tell us why he chose to hand Jesus over to the authorities. Was he jealous? Was he greedy? Was he simply a coward, afraid that his proximity to Jesus would get him killed? Or, more troubling, was he merely a pawn in the divine plan of salvation, a means to an end, to fulfill what the scriptures had prophesied? Do we hate him for betraying our Savior, or do we thank him for doing what had to be done?

There are no good answers, and our gospel writer does not seem interested in giving us any either. John chalks Judas' betrayal up to providence. He does not dwell on the motivations hatched in Judas' heart, but instead situates his betrayal on a cosmic level. Jesus chose Judas, and Judas chose Jesus. We cannot unlock the complex interplay of divine sovereignty and human freedom that is woven through this narrative. Instead, we can only sit back and observe the tragic consequences of a friend turning against a friend.

And it is tragic. It's tragic because, just prior to this scene, we find Jesus on his knees, tenderly washing his disciples' feet as proof of his love for them. He washes Judas' feet, even as he already knows that this friend and companion, in whom he has trusted, who shared his table and ate of his bread, will lift his heel against him (Psalm 41:9). But still, Jesus loved him. Still Jesus loved him, cherished him, opened himself up to him, despite the seed of treachery that lay dormant between them. It was love at its most vulnerable, a defenseless love that risked being nailed to a cross to prove how wide and deep and long and high God's love is for us all (Eph 3:18).

"I give you a new commandment," says Jesus, "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34-35).

We cannot read Judas' treachery apart from Jesus' command to love. Jesus offers forth his life as a gift to his disciples, and he calls upon the disciples to do the same for each other. This is a love that knows no limits, not even the boundaries of our mortal existence, which Jesus claims is forfeit to our discipleship. *Lay down your life*, he says. *Give it away. Do not hoard it for yourself. Only by doing this can you experience what love really is.*

And to this exquisite, self-sacrificial gift, Judas turns his back and he walks away.

Perhaps you know what it is to offer yourself completely to a person, only to have them trample that offering into the dust. Perhaps you have felt the spear thrust of betrayal, your vulnerability rewarded with a silent knife between the ribs or a kiss on the cheek. A friend, a lover, a family member. It does not matter who or where or what – treachery is an old, old tale.

But when I read this passage, I am not Jesus, bleeding internally from my betrayer. I am Judas. I sit in his place at the table, and Jesus leans across with a piece of bread in his hand and he looks straight into my eyes, and he says, "Do quickly what you are going to do."

Do it quickly.

Choose your pride over my call to humility, but do it quickly.

Choose your wealth and your privilege over my call to serve the least of these, but do it quickly.

Choose your comfort over my call to take up your cross and follow me, but do it quickly.

Choose your career and reputation over my call to preach the gospel, but do it quickly.

Choose your life over my call to lay it down, but *if you love me*, do it quickly.

How many times in a day do we turn our backs on the God who, at our baptism, claimed us as His own? How many times in a day do we see that what God offers us is *good*, but turn away because it also may be *hard*? How many times in a day do we look our Lord and Savior in the eye and, like the prodigal son, take our inheritance and walk away?

“My people are bent on turning away from me!” cries the LORD through the prophets (Hosea). Our proclivity to betrayal is literally ancient history; it seems we have always been and will always be the ones leaving God.

And so, Jesus says, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” He hands us a piece of bread dipped in wine, a token of his friendship, even though he knows how fickle our hearts are. Eucharist after Eucharist, he hands us his body and his blood, broken and spilled for our sakes, even though he knows that between the altar and the door, we will forget whose we are. What treachery do I bring with me to the LORD’s table? What treachery do you bring? The Church, the Bride of Christ, is forever playing the harlot. Every sin betrays the weakness of her vows. Every betrayal drives the nails deeper into his body.

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“Do quickly what you are going to do.”

The scripture tells us that when Judas received the piece of bread from Jesus, “Satan entered into him” (v. 27). In that moment, whatever conscious or unconscious evil inclination Judas had nursed against Jesus in his heart was consummated by the supernatural. This is not a figurative expression for our gospel writer; John is literally attributing Judas’ actions to a demonic possession. And in so doing, he elevates the drama between Jesus and Judas to a drama between Jesus and the Devil. When Jesus says “Do quickly what you are going to do,” he is no longer speaking solely to Judas; he is speaking directly to Satan.

And as God and the Devil face off across the table, we can see Judas a little clearer. He is as we are – broken and sinful creatures, whose brokenness often cannot withstand the powerful onslaught of forces in our world – supernatural or not – that oppose our God. Rarely can we claim a demonic possession as our excuse, but we are nevertheless, without the power and presence of God in our lives, held captive to the treacherous nature of sin. “I am of the flesh,” said Paul,

“sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom 7:14-15).

But this is where Jesus’ words become good news for us. For when he says, “Do quickly what you are going to do,” something simple but remarkable happens: Judas stands up and walks out of the room. He walks out into the night to do Jesus’ bidding. In other words, Jesus looks Satan right in the eye and commands him to betray Jesus to the authorities. And Satan obeys.

And it is in that very moment that Jesus’ glory is revealed. “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him” declares Jesus (v. 31). His final hour has arrived, and we see in him the power of the Almighty God, whose authority extends over all, even the cosmic forces of evil arrayed against him, conspiring to send Him to His death. Those cosmic forces whittled down to the figure of Judas, to whom Jesus says “Go,” knowing full well what is coming. There is nothing about the now unfolding journey to the cross that is not under Jesus’ control. He commands even his foes, turning treachery into triumph at Calgary. His glory will be the cross, and then the open grave, as a sign that sin and death have at last been overcome.

“Do quickly what you are going to do.”

With those words, we find ourselves in the place of Judas, with Jesus speaking directly to the sin that holds us captive. It is a command; it is a defiant dare. And we have this assurance that there is nothing in the forces of hell or this world that can constrain our God. There is no treachery or evil within us that God does not have authority over. We approach the LORD’s table and we fall on our knees and we cry, “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on me, a sinner.” And Jesus looks at us, and he hands us his body and his blood, and he tells our sin to “Go.” And just like that we are forgiven. Just like that we are set free.

Amen.