



From the Pulpit: March 13, 2022
Second Sunday in Lent

The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg

Matthew 26:14–16, 47–50; 27:3–5

Lent in Plain Sight, III: Coins

Our Lenten Sermon Series at Kenilworth Union Church is titled, “Lent in Plain Sight” based on a book authored by Jill J. Duffield. In the book she take eight common objects and shows how the are symbolic aspects of the passion of Jesus. Today we are looking at coins.

teeth, speaks the language, that’s what you’d get. It was the price of a slave.

Well why not? That’s what he always called himself. “I came not to be served but to serve,” he always said. So why not? Thirty pieces of silver—the price of a slave.

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.” At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” But they said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.

“And believe me being Jesus’ CFO was no day at the beach. He didn’t even think about money.”

In your own coin, it would be worth less than \$10,000 today. Would you sell your best friend to his enemies for \$10,000? The price of a ten-year-old Jeep?

But I swear I didn’t do it for the money. Look if money were all I were after, would I have left my thriving accounting business to follow a traveling preacher without a red cent to his name? I staked

everything on this man—my business, my reputation, my way of life. I was his Treasurer. I was his CFO. Jesus entrusted his cash to me.

And believe me being Jesus’ CFO was no day at the beach. He didn’t even **think** about money. I’d be down to my last \$100 and some filthy beggar would hold out his tin cup and Jesus would turn to me and say “Give him a twenty,” and I’d say “But Jesus, I’m down to my last hundred, and we have to have a room for tonight and what are we going to eat, all 13 of us...” “Give him a twenty.” So I handed over a twenty and stretched my last eighty just a little further.

But it wasn’t the money. I turned him in to those sanctimonious Pharisees because, well I turned him in because he let me down.

Thirty pieces of silver. As I look back on it, I guess I didn’t strike a very good bargain, did I? Shouldn’t the Son of God be worth more than that paltry sum?

Why thirty pieces of silver? Well because it was the going rate for a slave in my day. Good strong back, all his

My name is Judas Iscariot, which tells you who I am. Can you hear it? Judas: Greek for Judah, the prototypical Jew. Judas Iscariot. In Hebrew: *Yebudah Ish Kerioth*. It means “The Praiseworthy One, from Kerioth in Judea.” My family crest bore the image of a fearless lion. I was so proud to be a Jew, so proud to serve the one true God, *El Shaddai* of Israel. No one loved his land more than I.

I had waited all my life, all my life, for the return of God’s sovereignty to my homeland, the end of Roman despotism, the end of an endless age when every blessed thing in Judea bore Caesar’s imprint on it, his face leering out at us from our coins and our buildings and our newspapers everywhere we looked.

More than anything else in all the world I wanted the Jews to be free again, to bow before a Jewish prince, not a Roman puppet like Herod—Vladimir Putin in a toga.

And then this prophet from Nazareth comes to town. “The kingdom of God is at hand,” he said. How many times had I heard it before? But this was different. *He* was different.

By the thousands the common folk flocked to his side. They would do anything he asked. He made the lame walk and the blind see. He turned a little boy’s lunch into a banquet for 5,000. He turned water into wine. He talked like a king.

I went to the library, did some research, looked up his family tree, discovered that this man’s ancestor 52 generations back was none other than King David himself. He had royal blood in his veins.

Then in the streets you heard the word *Messiah* whispered among the Jews and *Christos* among the Greeks: the anointed prince, the son of David.

And my hopes built to a blaring crescendo one Sunday when he rode into Jerusalem like a king and the people hailed him as one. “Hosanna!” they shouted. “Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord!”

This is it I said to myself. This is the moment. It was the happiest day of my life. And the worst.

Because what did he do when he finally got to Jerusalem? He went to the Temple to pray, the sissy. He prayed, and he preached, and he taught, and he told more of his adorable little stories about sheep and coins and runaway sons.

I said, “Lord the time for words is over. We’ve heard enough cute stories. This is the moment for decision and action.” And he said to me, “Hold your tongue, Judas. You don’t understand. My kingdom is not of this world.” And then he began babbling about coming to Jerusalem to die.

You want to know what it was like for Judea in the first century? Just look at any headline or any screen in your world. A global superpower bristling with tanks and missiles invades and occupies a tiny harmless neighbor and starts bombing maternity wards. Russia is 28 times the size of Ukraine. Rome was hundreds of times bigger and stronger than Israel. The Roman Empire made Russia look like Lichtenstein.

“And he said to me,
‘Hold your tongue,
Judas. You don’t
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this world.’”

Did you see that video of Ukrainian women in body armor?

*We are the women of Ukraine, they said.
We want you to know that we have blessed our
men as we sent them into battle.
And we have delivered our children to safety to
protect our genetic heritage.
Now we will stand with our men to protect every
inch of Ukrainian soil.
We will destroy the enemy in every
city, every village, every forest, and
every field.
For every child, woman, old man,
ruined house, bombed street, and
battered barn.
We will shoot you for the rabid dogs
that you are.
Glory to Ukraine!
Death to the Enemy!*

That's the attitude you need in the presence of a bully. But Jesus would never say anything like that.

And I, I just lost it. My dream of Jewish freedom was no closer to reality than it had been when I'd first hooked up with this loser. *He* wanted to *die*. I wanted to *win*. All I wanted was to *win*.

And so I knew what I had to do. I had to get him out of the way. He was preaching **humility** when what we needed was **courage**. He was preaching **peace** when what we needed was **war**. He was preaching **love** when what we needed was **hatred**.

So I sold him. Not really for 30 pieces of silver. That was just a bonus, something to start over with once we found a new leader to take his place. I sold him for my homeland, for our freedom. I sold him for God. I thought I was doing God's will.

I'm not looking for your **sympathy** or your **pity** or even for your **understanding**. I just want to tell you that **good** people do **bad** things for **good** reasons. You know where I went wrong? I went wrong because I had forsaken the **best** for the **good**. That's what I did: I chose the **good** over the **best**, the **high** over the **highest**. I loved my **land** more than I loved my **Lord**.

Don't be so smug. Have you done it yourself? Have you chosen the **good** over the **best**? Have you chosen your **nation** over your **God**?

Have you loved your family so much that you've forgotten about all the other families on the face of the earth? Have you been so devoted to your corporation that you've betrayed your integrity? Are you for sale? Do you have a price? Is it higher than 30 pieces of silver?

People hiss when they say it: Judasss Isssscariot. Have you ever noticed how many villainous names sport an 's'? Serpent, Satan, Smaug, Sauron, Smeagle. It's so you can hiss those EVIL names like a snake.

'I went wrong because I had forsaken the best for the good. That's what I did: I chose the good over the best, the high over the highest. I loved my land more than I loved my Lord.'

In his famous poem—called *The Divine Comedy*, ironically—Dante Alighieri says there are nine circles in hell. Guess who's at the bottom—at the center of the earth, as far from God as it's possible to get. Do I deserve such immortal slander? I'll let you decide.

—Prayers of the People—
By The Reverend Christine V. Hides

SERMON NOTES

The four Gospels explain the motivation for Judas' betrayal of Jesus in different ways. In the Gospel of John, Judas, a 'thief' who 'loves money', is motivated by pure and simple greed.

In Matthew, similarly, Judas' first question to the Jewish authorities is "How much money will you give me to betray him to you?"

But in Mark, it is not as clear that the betrayal was perpetrated for mercenary reasons. Rather Judas and the authorities seem to share the common goal of getting Jesus out of their way, so they conspire to do him in; the money seems almost an afterthought.

In Luke, Judas' motivation for betrayal comes neither from greed nor animosity but from Satan, who seduces Judas into handing Jesus over to his enemies. As in Mark, the money seems almost an afterthought.

*This dramatic monologue takes its **text** from Matthew's version of the Passion events, but its **explanation** of Judas' motivation is closer to the Gospel of Mark.*

Here I wanted to explore the idea that Judas' patriotism—something larger, more complicated, and more interesting than mundane greed—motivated him to forsake and betray his friend.

This was done for a scriptural and a homiletical reason. First of all there is scriptural warrant for the speculation that Judas' motivation was more patriotic than mercenary. The name Judas Iscariot, the only Jewish name among the twelve otherwise Galilean disciples of Jesus, tells us a lot about him including perhaps, the fact that his fatherland is central to his very identity and self-understanding.

The homiletical reason is that loyalty to a great good as a motivation for doing a bad thing is a much more interesting idea to play with than abject greed.

Inspired by Psalm 51, a beloved psalm to one whose family is in Kyiv.

Merciful God of steadfast love, you desire purest wisdom and inner truth for us.

You forgive our transgressions, bringing wholeness, peace, and reconciliation into every corner of our lives. You draw us together in community to seek your kingdom. You purify the desires of our hearts and create in each of us a yearning for the joy of your salvation.

Knowing your abundant mercy, we bring to you the concerns of our neighbors and the aches of this world, entrusting all things to your steadfast love:

Bring healing to those whose bodies, minds, and spirits are in need. Bring relief to those who lack food, water, shelter, educational opportunities, and medical care. Bring peace to those who are troubled by long-standing hurts and justice to those who long for freedom.

Though we struggle to find words, we pray for those places in the midst of armed conflict, especially for Ukraine. We pray that your peace might settle long-standing internal conflicts in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. For places around the world forgotten and unknown to us, we pray for an end to violence and unrest. Protect civilians and soldiers from the weapons of war.

We remember those seeking refuge from war, famine, hate, economic impossibility, and for all those displaced from their homelands. Draw near to the overwhelmed borders and resettlement agencies struggling to meet the demand, O God. Let generosity of hearts and resources flow to those in greatest need.

And for world leaders, we pray that your wisdom and power prevail over the evils of greed and lust for war, not only in the time to come, but today.

Lord, our God and deliverer, draw us ever-nearer to your presence. Hear the prayers of our hearts for which there are no words. Let us always sing praise to you, by the power of your spirit, through your son, Jesus Christ who teaches us to pray: Our Father.... Amen.