

May 15, 2022
Sermon Manuscript

John 13:1-2,12-30 (NIV)

¹ It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus...

¹² When Jesus had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.

¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

¹⁸ "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.'

¹⁹ "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. ²⁰ Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I

send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."

²¹ After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."

²² His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. ²³ One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴ Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

²⁵ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." ²⁸ But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹ Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. ³⁰ As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Keep Us from the Sin of Judas (Jn 13:1-2,12-30, Ps 139)

This morning I took the liberty of changing the gospel passage appointed for today. Our lectionary had us scheduled to read from John 13:31-35, which I still included in gray, when - toward the end of the Last Supper and having just washed the feet of his disciples - Jesus gives them a new command to love one another, as he has loved them. But with Dolores having essentially just preached on that at our Maundy Thursday service last month, I was drawn this week to the verses that immediately precede this 'new commandment', but that are *never* appointed in our three-year lectionary, which detail the final moments before Judas departs the fellowship of the disciples to go out and *betray* Jesus. **The story of Judas is a sobering reminder that all of us are vulnerable to evil, and that it is not just evil from outside of us that threatens our well-being, but also evil from within.** Although Jesus would himself overcome evil & sin at the cross, none of us will be completely free of its influence - including our hearts will not be *fully* cleansed of their sinful impulses - until Jesus returns and vanquishes evil forever. **But the good news is that we can safeguard our hearts from being overcome by evil through persevering in the life of the Church, by practicing true repentance and by inviting God to shine His light on anything that is not of Him.**

In 1970, the winner of the Academy's Award for Best Picture was *The Godfather*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola and based on the mob novel by Mario Puzo. And I would imagine that many of you have seen this film, but there is a particular scene that has always stood out for me when Michael Corleone is at a baptism. He's making vows to be the godfather for his newborn nephew. But at the

very same time, those loyal to him are carrying out an elaborate cascade of mob hits - killings, which will clear the way for Michael to take over his family's mafia business. And so, spliced between the priest asking Michael "Do you renounce Satan?" and Michael affirming, "I do renounce him," are flashes to the scenes of these ghastly murders that are taking place under Michael's order. "Do you renounce all his works?" and Michael affirms, "I renounce them." Then it cuts to screaming victims. "And all his pomps?" and Michael says, "I do renounce them," then it cuts back to the chattering of a machine gun. And so on.

Well, this infamous scene highlights someone in Michael who has succumbed to the darkness of evil, despite being - at least to some extent - *in* the Church. And in doing so it calls to attention the human capacity to live a double life. Now, it may do this in an extreme way - it is Hollywood, after all - and I feel pretty confident that no one here has minions carrying out murders this morning. Nonetheless, it is a reminder that while the Church is holy and is the body of Christ, neither the Church as an institution nor its members are immune from being overcome by evil or perpetrating it on others. But **the good news is that we can safeguard our hearts from being overcome by evil through persevering in the life of the Church, by practicing true repentance and by inviting God to shine His light on anything that is not of Him.**

In the story of Jesus' passion, there are plenty of bad actors who contributed to His death - from the Roman soldiers to the high priest Caiaphas, from Pilate to Herod, but for us as followers of Jesus, Judas is the one who should sober us the most. This is a guy who had been chosen by Jesus as one of his twelve closest disciples, who had been *living with* Jesus for three years - so he had heard Jesus' teaching and seen him perform untold miracles; with his own two eyes, he had seen Jesus' glory. And yet, before the Last Supper even begins, verse 2 says the devil had prompted Judas to betray Jesus; then after it, verse 27 says that as Jesus essentially hands Judas the bread of Communion, Satan enters into Judas; and finally with that bread still in hand and with his feet freshly washed, verse 30 describes Judas wilfully leaving the light of Christ and going out into darkness to do what he'd made his mind up to do: eventually coming to find Jesus with soldiers in tow and betraying him with a kiss.

Commenting on today's gospel passage, theologian Lesslie Newbigin wrote, "Here is the strange paradox of the Church: (that the Church) is at once holy and sinful. The Lord himself is present in (the Church's) life, yet Satan is also present. This is a summons to both realism and faith."¹ But this realism is not to excuse the misdeeds of the Church or Christians in any way. In recent years, the Church's complicity in atrocities of the past - such as slavery, genocide, and sexual abuse - and travesties of the present - such as church leaders abusing their power, committing extortion or further sexual abuse - such misdeeds have been increasingly brought to light and hopefully accountability for as such misdeeds will increase as well. But putting aside the institutional abuses wrought by the Church or its leadership, for us *personally*, Judas should sober us and cause us to recognize that we all remain vulnerable to evil. As the prophet Jeremiah observed, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked..." And we're warned in 1 Peter that "Our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." So even as Christians, any of us has the potential for our hearts to be overcome by evil, regardless of how closely we have known Jesus. But **the good news is that we can safeguard our hearts from being overcome by evil through persevering in the life of the Church, by practicing true repentance and by inviting God to shine His light on anything that is not of Him.**

As disturbing as it may be to see evil operating in Judas in today's John passage, it *is* heartening to *also* see that Jesus is still sovereign over it all. First, while the other disciples appear completely oblivious, Jesus is clearly aware of everything the enemy is up to. But he displays not only His divine insight, but his sovereignty over evil as well, as once He says to Judas, "What you are about to do, do quickly," as He hands him the bread, the next action described is Judas taking the bread going out (v30).

¹ Frederick Bruner's commentary on John, p 778

In other words, Jesus may be allowing Satan and Judas to carry out their plans so God can bring about a greater good, but there is no question that Jesus is in charge; that *He* is more powerful than evil, not the other way around.

But Jesus did not inhibit Judas from doing what he had set his mind to do - even though at this point Judas had succumbed to evil in His heart, Jesus did not violate Judas' free will to step in and stop it. And so, with all of us having hearts that are vulnerable to being overcome by evil, the question remains, how can we safeguard against it? And the good news is that there are answers - there is hope - we need not despair or feel helpless against the enemy's plans to overcome us, because even though Jesus would allow it, He doesn't want it and He has provided us with safeguards against becoming like Judas. **The good news is that we can safeguard our hearts from being overcome by evil through persevering in the life of the Church, by practicing true repentance and by inviting God to shine His light on anything that is not of Him.** We need to understand that Judas was not an intrinsically worse person than any of us, but he also did not become a traitor to Jesus overnight. So before wrapping up today, I want to look at how each of these three safeguards had either broken down for Judas or never even been in place; though I'm going to look at them in a different order than I've been stating them.

A chapter before this in John's gospel, he had disclosed that Judas had been living a double life. I've included in your bulletin: John reports that among the twelve disciples, Judas was the "keeper of the money bag" - the treasurer - but that he would steal. John says Judas "was a thief... he used to help himself to what was put into (the money bag)."² Well, this love of money gave a foothold that the enemy - the evil one - could exploit, which made it all the more difficult for Judas to do the right thing when the religious leaders who wanted Jesus dead came offering thirty pieces of silver.³ And this is the **first** way that we make ourselves vulnerable to being overcome by evil in a dramatic way: by leading a double life. When we live double lives, it is rarely as stark or dramatic as Michael Corleone. For some, a double life means compartmentalizing Sunday morning and being a different person the rest of the week - lacking an integrated self; for others, it means having secret sin; or both can be the case. This is why I really appreciate that following the corporate confession we'll do in a few minutes, the liturgy has the priest state at absolution that "Almighty God... has promised forgiveness of sins to all those who sincerely repent and with true faith turn to him." Am I the only one who is challenged by that? To be as sure as I can that when I confess my sins, I'm not keeping any parts of my life off limits from God? Confessing our sins regularly and being truly repentant is what prevents the footholds the enemy gains in our life from turning into strongholds, but there is no evidence of Judas ever doing this: that he had ever owned up to his sin of thievery and greed, let alone repented of it. And so, it eventually got the best of him.

Friends, we need to ask ourselves: is there an area of our lives where we are not seeking to be truly repentant, where we haven't been willing to bring sin into the light with another believer (clergy or lay), where we are hanging onto that sin and refusing to turn away from it? The longer we persist with that posture of defiance, the more likely that sin is to get the best of us, and unfortunately: we don't get to decide the consequences.

² John 12:1-6 "1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint[a] of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it."

³ Mt 26:15

So having a double life is the first factor that led Judas to be overcome by evil in a way he would seriously regret; he had at least one area of his life that he was never really repentant about.

But, you know, *even* if we were to be utterly repentant about all of the sin we're *aware* of, the reality is that all of us are going to have sin in our lives that we are completely blind to, where we've deceived about what is right and good. I wonder: has anyone here ever had an epiphany, where after years of acting in a certain way or holding a certain attitude that you were *convinced* was *righteous*, God revealed to you that you were wrong? Anybody ever had that happen? Man, I've had that happen a lot more times that I'd probably like to admit. And to be honest, I expect it to *keep* happening with some regularity as I continue to walk with Jesus. Why? Because my perspective is limited; and because our human capacity for self-deception is just off the charts. Like Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

Well, bringing this home to Judas, there are some scholars who've suggested that Judas may have actually believed what he was doing was good and righteous (!), or at least rationalized that it was. The theory goes that Judas did not think of himself as forsaking God, but simply that the way of Jesus - the way Jesus was going about bringing God's kingdom - was mistaken. So Judas had lost confidence in Jesus and lacked the imagination to see how Jesus' self-sacrificing, enemy love could ever win the day, or perhaps Judas was just not willing to follow through with what he foresaw it would require. And this continues to be a major problem among followers of Jesus even to this day, as more and more Christians are seeking to bring about the kingdom through worldly power and coercion, rather than through sacrificial love.

But where we may be blind, the Lord sees all. That Jeremiah passage begins with God saying, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" But then God continues, "I the Lord search the heart..." So what we can do is, like the final two verses of the Psalm we read today (139:23-24), we can pray, "²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and examine my thoughts. ²⁴ Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

So the good news is that we can safeguard our hearts from being overcome by evil by practicing true repentance and by inviting God to shine His light on anything that is not of Him, but also (finally) through persevering in the life of the Church.

Now, this is not to say we should always stay in a particular church. As we mentioned already, because the Church is not *immune* from evil or perpetrating harm, there are absolutely circumstances where leaving a *particular church* is absolutely the correct thing to do; for example, if toxic or abusive or immoral conduct is identified in leadership, but it remains unacknowledged or minimized by those perpetrating it. And such a courageous act as leaving a church can often lead to disillusionment or confusion or woundedness in one's faith life. But nevertheless, we still need the body of believers; we still need one another.

Meanwhile, the way our passage ends is with Judas walking away from Jesus and his friends who were seeking to live in the light, and walking out into the darkness. And that is when he succumbed to the temptation in full; that's when it's a done deal.

And this is perhaps the biggest difference between Judas and Peter. Last week we talked about Jesus' restoration of Peter for denying him three times. And goodness, the gospels seem chocked full of Peter's failings, don't they? But no matter what foolish thing he did, Peter would still remain with Jesus

and remain with his fellow disciples. Even after Peter denied Jesus three times, he came back. And that seems to be a key difference between Peter, who by the book of Acts grows into a remarkably faithful and wise human being, and the Judas, who despaired of living before Jesus could even restore him.

The good news is that we can safeguard our hearts from being overcome by evil through persevering in the life of the Church, by practicing true repentance and by inviting God to shine His light on anything that is not of Him.

Now, notice: just one of these alone is insufficient. Michael Corleone showed us that: he's hanging out with the priest and giving God lip service. Even the first two together - persevering in the church and practicing true repentance - go a long way. But all three? When we add to those first two, regularly welcoming God to search our hearts and to reveal that which is not of Him so we *can* repent, I would suggest a lifestyle like that will insure us - not against ever committing sin, of course - but against being like Judas and being overcome by evil to great, and often irreversible, consequence.

The good news is that we safeguard ourselves from being overcome by the darkness of evil by living as much as we can in the light as much. So will you come into the light with me by joining me in prayer?

Heavenly Father, how are you speaking to us this morning?

Is there an area of our lives where we've been refusing to repent or be accountable to others? Give us the faith to trust your way is so much better. Give us hearts of repentance.

Lord, are there sinful attitudes or outlooks we maintain that we are blind to, where we call what is good 'evil' or what is evil 'good'. Holy Spirit, search our hearts.

And finally, God, have we organized our lives in such a way that we're going to receive what we need from our fellow believers and provide the presence that they need from us? Show us how much more life-giving that can be than even the greatest pleasures of this world.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

RESPONSE HYMN: "The Traitor"

Tune: Hamburg - "When I Survey"

1. Oh Judas! How couldst thou betray / The Lord who gave thee life and breath; / And see the Savior fall a prey / To suffering, shame, reproach and death!
2. The solemn vows are now forgot, / And sacred friendship all abused; / But Christ foreknew the treacherous plot, / Nor the deceitful kiss refused.
3. How could the wretch unmoved survey, / A face so lovely and divine; / How such a friend of friends betray, / Whose acts to him were all benign!
4. Haunted with grief and deadly fear, / He mourns the vile transaction done; / But all is vain, when black despair / O'erwhelms his soul, and heaven is gone.
5. Lord, while I tremble at his fall, / Oh let me not his course pursue; / Be thou my love, my all in all, / To thee may I be ever true!

OFFERTORY HYMN: "Lord, You Have Searched Me"

Tune: Duke Street - "Jesus Shall Reign"

1. LORD, you have searched me and you know / where'er I rest, where'er I go; / you search my thoughts and know my plans, / and all my ways are in your hands.
2. My words from you I cannot hide, / you hem me in on ev'ry side; / O wond'rous knowledge, awesome might, / unfathomed depth, unmeasured height!
3. Where can I from your Spirit be? / Where can I from your presence flee? / In heav'n? it is your dwelling fair; / in death's abode? lo, you are there.
4. If deepest darkness cover me, / to you the darkness light shall be; / if light about me be as night / to you both night and day are bright.
5. O search me, God, my heart discern, / and try me, God, my thoughts to learn; / and lead me, if in sin I stray, / to choose the everlasting way.

Academy Award Best Picture Winners

2021 - CODA
2020 - Nomadland
2019 - Parasite
2018 - Green Book

2017 - The Shape of Water
2016 - Moonlight
2015 - Spotlight
2014 - Birdman

2013 - 12 Years A Slave
2012 - Argo

2011 - "The Artist"

2010 - "The King's Speech"

2009 - "The Hurt Locker"

2008 - "Slumdog Millionaire"

2007 - "No Country for Old Men"

2006 - "The Departed"

2005 - "Crash"

2004 - "Million Dollar Baby"

2003 - "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King"

2002 - "Chicago"

2001 - "A Beautiful Mind"

2000 - "Gladiator"

1999 - "American Beauty"

1998 - "Shakespeare in Love"

1997 - "Titanic"

1996 - "The English Patient"

1995 - "Braveheart"

1994 - "Forrest Gump"

1993 - "Schindler's List"

1992 - "Unforgiven"

1991 - "The Silence of the Lambs"

1990 - "Dances With Wolves"

1989 - "Driving Miss Daisy"

1988 - "Rain Man"

1987 - "The Last Emperor"

1986 - "Platoon"

1985 - "Out of Africa"

1984 - "Amadeus"

1983 - "Terms of Endearment"

1982 - "Gandhi"

1981 - "Chariots of Fire"

1980 - "Ordinary People"

1979 - "Kramer vs. Kramer"

1978 - "The Deer Hunter"

1977 - "Annie Hall"

1976 - "Rocky"

1975 - "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest"

1974 - "The Godfather Part II"

1973 - "The Sting"

1972 - "The Godfather"

1971 - "The French Connection"

1970 - "Patton"

1969 - "Midnight Cowboy"

1968 - "Oliver!"

1967 - "In the Heat of the Night"

1966 - "A Man for All Seasons"

1965 - "The Sound of Music"

1964 - "My Fair Lady"

1963 - "Tom Jones"

1962 - "Lawrence of Arabia"

1961 - "West Side Story"

1960 - "The Apartment"

1959 - "Ben-Hur"

1958 - "Gigi"

1957 - "The Bridge on the River Kwai"

1956 - "Around the World in 80 Days"

1955 - "Marty"

1954 - "On the Waterfront"

1953 - "From Here to Eternity"

1952 - "The Greatest Show on Earth"

1951 - "An American in Paris"

1950 - "All About Eve"

1949 - "All the Kings Men"

1948 - "Hamlet"

1947 - "Gentleman's Agreement"

1946 - "The Best Years of Our Lives"

1945 - "The Lost Weekend"

1944 - "Going My Way"

1943 - "Casablanca"

1942 - "Mrs. Miniver"

1941 - "How Green Was My Valley"

1940 - "Rebecca"

1939 - "Gone with the Wind"

1938 - "You Can't Take It with You"

1937 - "The Life of Emile Zola"

1936 - "The Great Ziegfeld"

1935 - "Mutiny on the Bounty"

1934 - "It Happened One Night"

1932/1933 - "Cavalcade"

1931/1932 - "Grand Hotel"

1930/1931 - "Cimarron"

1929/1930 - "All Quiet on the Western Front"

1928/1929 - "The Broadway Melody"

1927/1928 - "Wings"