

## OVERCOMING DISILLUSIONMENT (Mt. 27:1-10)

You might be wondering why we're looking at this particular passage today—the account that Pastor Andrea read describes events that took place during what we call holy week, and normally we would consider it—when we do—during that week. It seems that we are getting ahead of ourselves since we haven't yet reached Palm Sunday. But remember that our theme during Lent is discovering how to redirect sorrow and disappointment, and this event qualifies under that theme as a moment of profound disillusionment, a close cousin to sorrow and disappointment.

We don't often delve very deeply into the story of Judas. We typically treat him as a villain—the betrayer—whom we consider scornfully. He is a tragic figure in biblical history, and my goal today is not to redeem his character or minimize his actions, but to recognize the human element in what took place that led him from a being a disciple of Jesus to his betrayer and the corresponding disillusionment he experienced as the result. His story serves as an example, at the very least—a caution or warning at most, in how our commitment to Christ can be subverted by competing ideas or ideology that can leave us disillusioned and distraught.

Matthew did a masterful job summarizing the horror Judas realized as the outcome of his actions flooded his awareness. Reading between the lines, it seems that this wasn't the outcome Judas had anticipated. As the plan of the religious leaders gained traction, a remorseful Judas sought redemption for his sin—the betrayal of innocent blood. Jesus, in confinement, wasn't available to him, so he came to the priests, whose role it was to mediate sin; Judas hoping perhaps to reverse the outcome or at least be absolved of his actions in it. But the priests abdicated their responsibility since providing such relief would have indicted their complicity in condemning innocent blood.

With his options for redemption exhausted, Judas was utterly alone in the world and self-condemned. In the depth of his despair, Judas rushed to judgment and exacted upon himself the punishment he felt he deserved. How that plays out in eternity is not ours to decide. Jesus himself, from the cross, pled forgiveness for those who had put him there for they did not know what they were doing. Judas could certainly fit that description. Again, that's not the point of our study today.

What we do want to see is the reality of his profound disillusionment, that began, perhaps imperceptibly, as an idea to catalyze the inauguration of the kingdom Jesus proclaimed. Judas likely held an impression of the kingdom not dissimilar to that of the other disciples. As we've seen previously, the popular conception of the kingdom was centered around the overthrow of Roman occupation, reclamation of the rightful throne, and cleansing of the Temple to restore it to its rightful role as a place of redemption and prayer. But we have also seen that Jesus had a view of the kingdom that differed from the popular idea. One of the most challenging aspects of Jesus' public ministry was to dislodge the popular idea of the kingdom in favor of God's idea for it. The popular idea was so entrenched that it persisted even among the twelve disciples. So one line of thought exploring Judas' motivation, which I think bears consideration, is that he thought to force Jesus into an explosive confrontation with the rulers whose rejection of Jesus was preventing him from fulfilling his destiny. Creating that moment would cause Jesus to claim his role, enforcing his rule by the power of God clearly at work in him, and rally the people behind him to expel the Romans. In this generous view of his motive, Judas was simply expediting what he believed to be the inevitable expression of the kingdom. *When* the seed of that idea began to germinate in Judas' mind is impossible to know, but if we accept the premise as plausible, we might see how Judas thought he had the best of intentions, though he held a flawed perception of both Jesus and the kingdom he proclaimed. Assuming the validity of the premise, we can understand the extent of Judas' disillusionment when he realized that his plan actually subverted the cause he believed he was promoting.

I felt the need to touch on the story of Judas today, because I believe there is a sense of disillusionment among some in the body of Christ in our day. The degree of disillusionment

varies as do the causes of it. There have been a fair number of Christ followers from different camps caught up in the political fervor that's recently swept through the nation who are at a loss to explain why prophetic announcements about outcomes haven't materialized. To a lesser degree, some among them wonder why the causes which righteousness would seem to support haven't been vindicated. Related to this, some Christ followers are disillusioned by the social unrest that continues—how is it possible that a nation held to be founded on Christian principles still wrestles with inequity, injustice, food insecurity and impoverishment? How effective are our churches given the persistence of these plights? What is our message, and what comprises our practice of discipleship in the face of these challenges? In addition to these systemic concerns, there is always the sense of personal disillusionment, when our own plans have gone awry, when we've thought: this is God's plan for me and how I will pursue it only to have them set aside either by a lack of traction or unforeseen circumstances visited upon us. And we wonder in the dead of night: but this was all for you God, what happened? That's happened to me. There was a time when Teresa and I believed in the possibility of doing mission work in Central America. We went there to speak with local leaders whose work we would support while supporting ourselves, but when we raised the flag, so to speak, no one saluted. We weren't profoundly disillusioned, but it did take the wind out of our sail.

Regardless of its basis, disillusionment can plague even a seasoned disciple. But like pain in our body, disillusionment is a symptom that something is amiss. It isn't insurmountable unless we acquiesce and declare it so. There is a way back that I want to suggest through a series of steps that accidentally, but conveniently all begin with the letter R starting with:

**Retreat** from the fray and fervor of the moment. Seasoned ocean swimmers know that the only way to get out of a riptide is to swim sideways to it—parallel to the shore. Swimming against it is useless—the power of the current will overwhelm the strongest swimmer. In like fashion, the best way to counter disillusion is to step away from its cause—move sideways out of it. That can mean fasting from newsfeeds, it can mean disengaging from the cause for a time. You can't be restored if you're still fighting battles. Change whatever you need to change to retreat—just stop.

Second step: **Regroup**, meaning make time and space for your fragmented soul to become whole again. When your heart and mind have been heading in different directions, your character, actions, and social relationships find themselves conflicted and sometimes compromised under the impulses of cross purposes. You fray internally, and the soul, meant to hold it all together collapses under the weight of competing forces. This is the place of self-examination under the guidance of God's Spirit where the shards of conflicting ideologies are extracted allowing your soul to heal as heart and mind align once more with God's heart and mind.

This is when the third step emerges where you **Recall** the motive and actions of the kingdom Jesus proclaimed and taught. The foundation of his Kingdom is to love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. The motive is love, not a squishy emotion, but to will and to act for the well-being of the one loved. You love God by deciding to act in concert with God's desires or purposes in God's time and character allowing God's Spirit to energize your efforts displaying God's beauty in the process. Loving your neighbor—those near you, in your circle of acquaintances and those who cross your path is always an expression of love for God for you are acting in ways that support the well-being of that one who, by the way, God also loves. How you love is as important as loving. Your respect of them, your care for their dignity, your assistance towards their well-being is a means of willing God's goodness upon them, and is also a means through which God loves them directly. This is kingdom beauty that blesses and is based in truth.

The fourth step is simply **Remember** who leads. We are, after all, Christ followers. Regardless of our skills, abilities, gifts, roles, areas of service, or opportunities, we are in all of this followers of Jesus who best knows how and where to use us in the mission he is pursuing and in which has made us his co-workers. As such, it is not our place to say, "You go on ahead, I'll catch up after I take care of this issue that's captured my attention." Nor is it our

place to out-pace Jesus, to get ahead of him and pursue an agenda of our design that we're sure will fit nicely into what we believe he's doing. That, you'll recall, was the error of Judas, and while our intended outcome might not be as malignant as his, we're still in the place of forcing Jesus into our agenda which will never accomplish his. I recognize and admit that this was the problem in my plan for mission work in Central America. What is your plan for today, Jesus, and how do I best fit into what you are doing? is the prayer of the Christ follower.

Which leads us to the last step: **Return** to the original call, which as you know began when Jesus said, "Follow me." Learn of me, learn from me. See what I'm doing and join me in it with my Spirit empowering you—grace. What is Christ doing? Feeding the hungry, Refreshing the thirsty, clothing the poor, welcoming the outsider, caring for the sick, visiting the imprisoned; making disciples—there's enough in just these ways to keep us engaged in whatever we do for a living, wherever we live, alongside whomever we live for as long as we live in this life. And then there's loving God and loving others—excel in this, for it is your life's joy now and in the life to come. AMEN