

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

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[0 : 00] Father in heaven, we humbly come before you as we open up your word, as we consider how Judas and the way he lived his life, how he betrayed your blessed son, and how he was unrepentant, and we consider his demise, Lord, help us to ultimately flee to you, Lord, that we would take heed, take and heed these words in front of us, and that it would go by your spirit deep into our heart as a warning to us, but Lord, that we wouldn't simply be afraid, but we would see godly fear, but also, Lord, we would see the great benefit of what it means to be your child, to be your son or your daughter, that it is truly the best thing, the most right thing we could ever do, and it is offered to us because of what Christ has done on the cross.

So, Lord, help us to be humble, help us to have hearts ready to receive, and we pray this in Christ's name, amen. Have you ever seen that optical illusion that, depending on the perspective you have, you either see a young and elegant woman or a haggard old lady?

You guys know what picture that is? I put it on the overhead, we don't have an overhead. Maybe I'll include it in the Sunday follow-up, but it's a remarkable picture, and then people have done other pictures that the one perspective, you know, looks like, I don't know, one thing, and the other perspective looks totally different.

It was actually, it finds, I looked it up, it finds its genesis in, like, the turn of the century, about the turn of the century, but it was popularized by a British cartoonist named William Eli Hill in the 1910s, and he named the picture my wife and my mother-in-law.

That is, that is something else. My mother-in-law, that's not, does not go for me. I love my mother-in-law, she's lovely.

[2 : 21] But it's so interesting how you can have one picture, and you can see only the one image, and yet, you have to almost take a step back and readjust to see the second image.

But what you can't do, is you can't see both images at the exact same time. And if you can, I don't know, maybe you have a trick, but by and large, you can't see both images at the same time.

Jesus has conquered all. He has died on the cross. The death tried to consume him, and he uses death itself to destroy death, by rising again after three days in the grave.

And he hasn't just defeated death by rising from the grave, but he ascends into heaven, and it is this wonderful picture of Jesus and his victory, his victory over sin and death and evil.

And he offers this salvation to all people. And it is our very heart's desire to know and be known, to love and be loved for all of eternity, and this is precisely what he offers in the cross.

[3 : 33] And yet, there are many people who do not see this when they look at Jesus, but rather see the cross as folly, as hate-filled, as bigoted and even dangerous.

How on earth can this one beautiful thing, the cross, be at once for us and those that are being saved, those that are being drawn to him?

How can it look so beautiful, and then others, it can be such an object of scorn? The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1.18, he also repeats it in a few other places in his letters.

He'll say this, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Like the young lady, old woman, optical illusion, Christ is either the wonderful Savior or he's terribly problematic.

He cannot be both. This also is actually the same from Christ's perspective. We are either wheat or tares, we are either sheep or goats, either we are his friends or we are his enemies.

[4 : 50] We cannot occupy a middle ground, for there is none. Again, the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

Friends, this is a difficult teaching. We like the nativity Christ who's meek and mild. We don't necessarily like the knight clad in white who will defeat all his foes with the word of his mouth.

And yet, this is the ultimate picture of Christ in the book of Revelation, the conquering knight who has defeated all his foes.

It's an interesting question to ask. Do you find yourself as a friend of God or as his enemy? We find ourselves in Acts chapter 1, the second part of Acts chapter 1, with his disciples in Jerusalem. They are devoting themselves to prayer. They are united in purpose. And they are obeying Jesus in waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And our section covers the 10 days after the ascension and before Pentecost.

[6:06] 10 days for when Jesus ascends to heaven and when the Holy Spirit comes down. And what's interesting, in 10 days worth of happenings, this is the only story that is recorded in those 10 days.

Maybe there is other significant things that have happened or that happened in that time, but we have no idea. Luke here, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, records only this one story.

So it's important. It's not merely a narrative filler, but something critical to help us to understand what it means to be either a friend of God or what it means to be an enemy of God.

So to help us understand this, you know, I didn't come up with any lovely points, but we're going to look at three people, in a sense. We're going to look at Judas, who is the traitor.

We're going to look at Peter, who is the friend. And ultimately, we're going to look at Christ, who is the knower of all hearts. So why don't we jump into our first, take a look at our first person, Judas, the traitor, and see what we can learn from this section.

[7:17] So look with me, Acts chapter 1, starting in the 15th verse. We'll go 15 to 20 here. When they returned to Jerusalem from the mount, called Olivet, oh, verse 12, I'll go down to 15.

In those days, Peter stood up among the brothers. The company of persons was in all, about 120, and said, Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in the ministry, in this ministry. Verses 18 and 19 seem to be Luke's commentary in this.

And this is what he says, Now this man, speaking of Judas, acquired a field. With the reward of his wickedness and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out.

And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language, Ekeldama, that is, the field of blood. Verse 20. This is Peter now.

[8:20] For it is written in the book of Psalms, May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it, and let another take his office. Quoting from Psalm 69 and 109, respectively.

Judas Iscariot, he was one of the twelve. He was called by Jesus. And yet, he became, as Peter called him, the guide to those who arrested Jesus.

He was offended at the scandalous nature of the good news of Jesus Christ, and as such became an active enemy agent. Quite the turnaround from a trusted, close disciple of Jesus.

He was one of the twelve. He was the inner circle, Jesus had many followers, but he was the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. And then he became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

And what was his fate? In the Gospels, it says that he killed himself. And yet, here, it says that he bought a field and fell headlong into it. Now, there is a discrepancy, at least from the Gospels to Acts, and there is, I think, a fine way of harmonizing the two.

[9:39] I think I'll end up, by the way, I'll put it in the Sunday follow-up. I hope you guys got that this week. I'm trying it out. If it works, great. If it's not so helpful, we can scrap it for something else.

But I'm not going to talk about how the Gospel accounts of Luke's, sorry, of Judas' suicide, how it harmonizes with what Luke says here in Acts chapter 1.

But nevertheless, Luke records here that Judas bought a field with the blood money he used to betray Jesus, and he fell headlong in the field, and his guts poured out, his bowels poured out.

So the question, it's an interesting question. Why would Luke break from the Gospel narratives to talk about Judas hanging himself? This is not in the Gospel narratives.

Why does he mention it? And I think there's a really interesting answer. In fact, Luke, he is constantly, and we'll see this throughout Luke, he constantly connects what's happening with the church with the Old Testament.

[10:50] There's allusions constantly to the Old Testament text. And I think this is one of them. So we see this, a similar story, in 2 Samuel chapter 20 with Joab.

If we have any Bible scholars and they know who Joab was, he was the former general of King David's army. He was trusted by King David. And Joab betrays David. He kills two people that David did not authorize. It was a form of betrayal. But the second person he killed was Amasa, the general that was going to take over for him, that in a sense, Joab was looked over for Amasa.

What does he do? In 2 Samuel chapter 20, to sum it up, he greets Amasa with a kiss. And without Amasa knowing, he has a knife on his left side and he uses it to stab Amasa in the stomach. And it says that Amasa's intestines poured out and he died on the road. He betrayed Amasa and really King David with a kiss. And then we have this interesting bit about the way Amasa died, the one he betrayed.

[12 : 11] Joab was a traitor and he killed in a cowardly way. And later on in 1 Kings chapter 2, we see that he is killed in a just way, but in a coward's, he gets what's coming to him in a very cowardly way himself.

He cowers and he is killed at the command of King Solomon. So with Judas, the one who would betray the King of Kings with a kiss, it's interesting.

And imagine with me here, if truly Luke is connecting this story of Judas to the Old Testament betrayer, Joab, we see a betrayal of the King with a kiss.

And although Judas doesn't take a knife and thrust it through Jesus' stomach, we end up having Judas suffer the same fate that Joab inflicted on Amasa.

That is to say that retribution happened for Judas because he was a coward, because he was a betrayer, because he was a traitor.

[13 : 21] He would suffer a fate similar to the one that Joab visited upon Amasa. Retribution enacted. And retribution might seem like something that wouldn't necessarily be condoned by the Lord in Scripture, but in this case, it's a godly thing for those who commit injustice.

It is an important thing to stop somebody from the cycle of committing injustice. In fact, St. Augustine will expand this.

The idea of loving your enemy can't actually happen unless you're willing to exact justice on your enemy's enemy. We are seeing this happen with Judas here.

But why are we talking about punishment when Jesus offers forgiveness? Why does Judas, who is a betrayer, suffer the fate of one who was betrayed?

Why does Judas not get the same fate, in a sense, as Peter? Did Peter not betray Jesus like Judas did?

[14 : 31] I mean, think about it. Peter swears, I swear to God I will follow you, Jesus, to your death. And what happens? He flees and he has three chances to make it right and he messes that up as well.

He betrays Jesus. And yet, Judas has his guts spilled out and he's buried and Peter is leading the church. Where is Judas' forgiveness?

Why are we speaking of his death and not, and his replacement and not talking about how Judas is with the twelve? Should forgiveness not be extended to him?

Judas is an enemy of Christ. He is one who refuses to put down his weapons. He is one who does not recognize his sin and throw himself at the mercy of Christ.

He is not one who humbles himself and recognizes that he needs to live under the lordship of Christ. It's not just a matter of indifference but a critical aspect of what it means to submit to the one true God.

[15 : 49] Judas does not ask for forgiveness and as such he continues to live at least in his own life on the throne of Christ.

He is king of his own castle. Judas led Jesus into the hands of those who wished to kill him because he was deep in his pride, he was deep in his resentment and he was deep in his greed.

And like Joab, Judas betrays Jesus. Judas and like Joab, Judas tries to undo his treachery by his own hand. I encourage you guys to read the story in 1 Kings 2.

It's a type of self-justification and like Joab, Judas refused to go to the only one who could redeem him. Pride and self-justification will always cause a heart of stone to remain stone and cause the enemy of God to remain an enemy of God.

Friends, when we try to cover up our sin or the sin of others to deny its effects in our lives to justify the motives of sin excuse the offense relativize it so that it is no longer a sin we call Christ a liar.

[17 : 03] We deny God his place as creator and king and we make ourselves keep ourselves make ourselves an enemy of God. And let me just say this friends this is not an enemy you want.

God judges so often in a passive way by handing us over to our rebellion so that we will suffer the natural and inevitable consequences of our actions.

Joab lived by the sword and what happened? He died by the sword. Judas was greedy he was prideful and he died unredeemed.

In the end we will get our heart's true desire in our pride. What do I mean by this? All too often God leaves us to our own devices and if we are not looking to God who is the creator of life who knows the way we ought to live we will inevitably go down the road to death.

there's not multiple ways that God has designed but only one way because he is the creator and he is good and he desires to bless and to redeem and to see his creation flourish.

[18 : 25] So if we choose to avoid such a way of living we will inevitably see destruction and pain in our own lives.

So this passive judgment C.S. Lewis in the great divorce he describes it like this there are only two kinds of people in the end those who say to God thy will be done and those to whom God says in the end thy will be done all that are in hell choose it without that self choice there could be no hell no soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it those who seek find those who knock it is opened Judas although ridden with guilt ultimately wants his will over Christ's will and we see a bit of that in the second part of verse 25 when Peter he's talking about Matthias or the one that they would pick to replace him and he says this to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go in his own place to do his own thing to go his own way

Judas ridden with guilt ultimately wants his will over Christ he's not willing to bend his knee and as such suffers a traitor's fate it is a terribly sad thing and it makes you wonder and it's speculation makes you wonder if Judas if things could have been different for him but they weren't he refused to call out to God for forgiveness there's this whole other side bit here that I mean because it was prophesied it speaks in a sense of God's providence and how does that interact with our free will maybe that'll make the Sunday follow up as well but that's not going to be an aside I'm willing to take this morning but it's a very excellent question Judas has suffered a traitor's fate well how about the traitor Peter we I referenced him moments ago but what separates

Judas the betrayer from Peter the betrayer Peter is equally a betrayer remember he denies Christ three times and yet here he is standing up amongst not just the eleven but the hundred and twenty he in a sense is the leader of the church and he is the one saying we need to fulfill scripture we need to get a twelfth we need to see this thing come to pass and we see in a sense what marks Peter is the the besetting sin of what marks Peter is the opposite of the besetting sin of Judas Peter constantly would humble himself before almighty God he constantly cried out to Christ for mercy in fact what greater person would there be to lead the church than Peter who sinned much but was forgiven much and as such loved much who fell worse than Peter amongst the eleven that remained none

Judas Judas' replacement had to be chosen and it had to be one who was witness to the entirety of Jesus' ministry from John's baptism to the resurrection that's what it says in verses 21 to 23 so one of the men who have accompanied us from all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us one of these men must become with us a witness to the resurrection that's why I think if you've heard the apostle Paul is the true 12th apostle or the true 12th disciple and Matthias we never really hear of him again I would say that based on verses 21 to 23 it truly is Matthias in fact we don't really hear much of any of the disciples apart from Peter James and John it's a bit of a side note but anyways what's happening here is the 12th disciple needs to be picked because what we see here is that the church is really a reconstitution of

[22 : 50] Israel the people of God it's in a sense a new and expanded Israel 12 disciples needed to be present as the church was birthed and in a sense walked into the promised land in the same way that the 12 tribes entered into the promised land after captivity these 12 would lead the church by the power of the Holy Spirit and they would continue as we found out last week that in the the ministry of Christ Jesus so ultimately what is to mark the 12 apostles and therefore what is to mark the church is a deep humility in Christ a genuine faith not perfect genuine doesn't necessarily equal perfect but a genuine faith in the lordship of Christ and his victory over all things what is to mark the

church is to be people that are marked by

God's merciful hand extending to them not a group of people that are cleaned up ready to go sinless but people recognizing their sin recognizing that in a sense we're all betrayers we're all enemies of God and that he has made a way for us to become friends we are a church that recognizes that above all of us is a lord that has conquered evil and sin and death which means no foe that we could face can ever overtake our king and although our bodies may break down and they will and our hearts may ache because life is very difficult and often tragic and difficulties come we can know that because Christ's victory is over all of our foes for all of eternity that we can rest secure that our souls can rest secure in him that's the good news of the gospel of Christ and that is something that we can achieve with self justification by pushing away the mercy and love extended to us by Christ Jesus and trying to figure out life ourselves and clean up our own lives we don't enjoy that same sort of eternal victory so the good news of the gospel of Christ is to mark his church and the gospel was to form a new and more expansive community of friends it seems kind of a quaint thing to say but not if you were an enemy of the king it's not a quaint thing to say that that I used to be an enemy destined for death and the gallows and the king himself saved me and now I'm his friend there's nothing quaint in that that's what Christ Jesus does he offers to us what we are so desperate for and he calls us to bear witness to that truth to other people so that unlike

Judas who is a guide to those who are trying to kill Jesus we are a guide for those that need Christ we don't bring the enemies to kill our king we bring our enemies to our king so he can make them his friends that's what it means to bear witness to the gospel so what it means to take on the very ministry of Christ himself to be a guide to the blind leading enemies of Christ to him like I said so that he can make them friends this is what marks Peter as a friend even though he was a betrayer this is what is offered to us today if you have enjoyed friendship with Christ but have fallen away or your heart has grown cold or you feel maybe at best estranged but if you're real like an enemy this is the time to come to him and like Peter cry out to mercy cry out for mercy to God himself through Christ friends guilt can be a wonderful thing if it's conviction and if it leads us to Christ guilt is a terrible thing if it does not lead us to Christ and it just is weight upon our backs and our weight and weight upon our backs some more and some more until our backs break we've looked at Peter sorry we've looked at Judas the betrayer we've looked at Peter the friend and now we'll look at Christ the heart knower look with me verses 24 to 26 and they prayed that is the 11 they prayed and said you Lord who know the hearts of all show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place and they cast lots for them and the lot fell on

[28 : 26] Matthias and he was numbered with the 11 apostles although the portion this portion of scripture is clearly about excuse me the choosing of Judas's replacement it helps us to understand the scripture helps us understand that Christ knows the hearts of all in fact in the original language this should read something like you Lord are the heart knower or the knower of all hearts this is like the title of Christ he's the heart knower who knows the heart of men and women except themselves and I would put forward to you maybe you don't even know your own heart super well I certainly don't Christ the heart knower and it speaks of his providence and lordship over all things so that he knows our hearts even when we do not so we live in a post modern world or a late modern world however you want to sum it up and the ethos really is moral relativism that that has the catch phrase or the motto follow your heart but really what it's really saying is follow your desires whatever is the thing that you're feeling today follow it and that can get us into all sorts of hurt but who can really know our hearts let alone enough to follow them we are complex and confused people we take in a great deal of information every single day that influences us for good or ill we want to and it's very confusing for us we want on one hand to have things that we don't have and yet we grow weary of the things that we wanted just yesterday for things that we might never get tomorrow we struggle with contentment and direction and satisfaction and purpose we want autonomy and yet we lament loneliness we want an interconnected community that is lifelong and yet desire fierce independence friends our hearts can be a very confusing place and it is hubris therefore to think we can navigate this life and find eternal meeting and transcendent joy by our own strength by our own will by following our own heart title of

Christ again Christ the heart knower he knows your heart he knows the things that you truly desire and he knows the confusion that you struggle with and the complexities and the contradictions and

the beauty also in your own heart that you struggle to express I mean he knows us all he knows every last bit of you so friends run to the heart knower run to Christ and trust yourself to him give him the worries and confusions and trust that all of it so that he can truly begin this work in your heart and you can enjoy his salvation which is himself and this is what it means to become his friend Judas in many ways is unlike us but in many ways he is like us we are like him same with Peter we were enemies of God first or Colossians chapter one speaks of this while we were still enemies of God what did Christ do he died for us we are all enemies of God let us not persist with that let us in fact come to Christ as his friends bending our knee to his lordship and seeking not your own justification your own salvation your own satisfaction but instead look to him and trust in his eternal goodness let's pray father father father we if we are open and honest with ourselves our hearts are incapable of being constantly good yes by your grace common grace we can do very good things and many people who are not Christians can do many good things but we cannot reconcile ourselves to you we cannot expunge the sin from our very being that only you can do so lord we come to you as your friends as former enemies and some people may be enemies that are soon to be friends but lord we come to you and we ask that by your spirit you will humble us and that you would sharpen us and make us a community of friends a community that is marked by friendship with you a community that really is honest with our brokenness true about our brokenness and that throws ourselves at your mercy lord would you have mercy upon us we thank you for all that you have done on the cross we pray this in Christ's name Amen