

## Peter, Judas and What's – His - Name

**Acts 1:15-17, 21-26**  
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**First Presbyterian Church**  
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Author and theologian Eugene Peterson considered the difference between Peter and Judas, saying, “Among the apostles, the one absolutely stunning success was Judas, and the one thoroughly groveling failure was Peter.”

Now, we don't tend to see it that way, but he's got a point. “Judas was a success in the ways that most impress us,” says Peterson. “He was successful both financially and politically,” controlling the apostles' money and manipulating political forces to accomplish his goal of seeing Jesus arrested.

Peter, on the other hand, “was a failure in ways that we ... dread: He was (weak) in a crisis and socially (clumsy),” hanging out with the guards while Jesus was tortured, and denying he even knew him! “Time, of course, has reversed our judgments on the two men,” noted Peterson. “Judas is now (known for his) betrayal, and Peter is one of the most honored names in the church and in the world. Judas is a villain; Peter is a saint.”<sup>1</sup>

And then there's Matthias, who replaced Judas as the 12<sup>th</sup> apostle. He's not remembered for anything, except being No. 12, all of which begs the question, “How do you want to be remembered?” Saint, villain, one among many, or one forgotten to time? Matthias, by and large, was forgotten to time. In fact, the only time he's mentioned in the Bible is in today's New Testament lesson. Peter gathers all the believers together – all 120 of them – and says, “Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled ... concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus – for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”

Looking at Judas, looking back on his ministry, Judas is remembered for betraying Jesus, and for committing other relatively minor transgressions like stealing from the common purse, pretending to care about the poor and criticizing someone for being kind to the Lord, anointing Jesus with perfume (John 12:4-6). How many of us would want to be remembered like that? Nobody.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Petersen quoted in: Tim Kimmel, Little House on the Freeway (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1994), 191-192.

And yet, we've all done what Judas did. There's no one alive who hasn't betrayed Jesus in word or deed. Take for example the little boy who knocked on his neighbor's door saying something of his had found its way into the neighbor's garage, and he wanted it back. The guy opened his garage door and noticed two new things: a baseball and a broken window, complete with a baseball-sized hole. "How do you suppose this ball got in here?" he asked the boy. The boy took one look at the ball, one look at the window, and one look at his neighbor, saying, "Wow! I must have thrown it right through that hole!"

There's no one alive who hasn't betrayed Jesus in word or deed, taken something that belonged to someone else, criticized others who were just trying to do a good deed, or denied having such failings and weakness just to maintain a sense of holier-than-thou self-righteousness.

Nobody wants to be like Judas, and yet, there's a little Judas in all of us; none of us is perfect. What are we to do in the face of such a horrific self-revelation? Well, don't be like Judas would be a good start.

Earlier in the Book of Acts, Peter tells about the fate of poor Judas. The story goes that Judas used the money he got for betraying Jesus to buy a field, and then as he went into the field, he fell down and died, and it was a graphic, horrific death.

That's in Acts 1:18, though in the Gospel According to Matthew (21:1-10), Judas is said to have returned the money and then killed himself. Either way, things did not go well for Judas.

And of course, no one wants to end up like that. The good news is, there is no reason on earth you have to end up like Judas, no matter what you might have done wrong in the past or what terrible thing you might do in the future.

Judas ended up like he did because he lost sight of Jesus, plain and simple. I mean, yes he was destined to betray Jesus in fulfillment of scripture, but as we've noted that could have been any of us. And yes, Judas died a terrible death, but we all will die one day.

The real question regarding Judas is did he die with betrayal in his heart, or did he repent and reach out to the Lord at the moment of his death. Of course, nobody knows the answer to that; nobody knows another's heart of hearts.

But what we do know is that if Judas did repent – and we pray he did – then he was forgiven, forgiven by Jesus and embraced by God.

No matter what you've done in the past or what you may do in the future, you can always turn to Jesus knowing that God still loves you and that God would never abandon you, as long as you don't abandon the Lord. That's Judas.

And then there's Peter. It's pretty much the same thing, to one degree or another. Peter also betrayed Jesus. While huddling with the guards in the courtyard, Peter says three times that he never knew Jesus, even as Jesus was being interrogated and beaten inside the palace of the high priest. Even after such betrayal, Peter was forgiven by Jesus, and in fact, Jesus entrusted the care of his flock, his church, to Peter. Remember, Jesus says to Peter three times, "Feed my sheep," after encouraging Peter to profess his love of Jesus three times, making up for the three times Peter denied Jesus, as if it never happened (John 21:15-17).

Not only is Peter forgiven, but Jesus elevates him to greatness. He says to Peter, "Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you used to fasten your own belt. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." And Bible tells us that "(Jesus) said this to indicate the kind of death by which (Peter) would glorify God" (John 21:18-19).

Peter had a long and exulted ministry and, in the end, he was crucified. How many of us want to be remembered like Peter? That's a lot to ask of someone – to give yourself so completely to the work of the Lord that you become a saint of the church in the fullest sense of the word, a saint and a martyr, literally giving up your life for the sake of your ministry. Few of us are called to such ministry.

And yet, we are all called to ministry of some sort. The Lord is counting on each and every one of you – and me – to be his hands and feet and heart in a world of too many fists and not enough hugs, too much running away and not enough standing up for Jesus, too much hate and not enough love.

Each and every one of us – each of you – has something you could do this very day to build up the kingdom of God, to speak Christ's truth to the misguided powers of this world, to find and comfort the many lost sheep of Jesus – many of whom you know personally – find them and bringing them back into the fold, back into the church, those last sheep of Jesus.

However you might do that-by phone call, encouraging words, offering a ride to church-however you might do that, doing it might feel like being crucified, but it's not. And if we do that, if we bring people back into the fold on behalf of Jesus, the Lord will exalt our humble, faithful ministry.

Look, what would you rather do today, this week – focus only on yourself and not give the desires of the Lord a second thought, like Judas? Or, how about seeking to be elevated to greatness like Peter? That might be tempting for some, that might be on someone's schedule this week. Or, how about just serving quietly but effectively in one form of ministry or another, like what's-his-name, Matthias?

You know, it's OK to not be remembered for doing great things in this world. It's OK to just quietly and effectively do the work of the Lord. In fact, it's more than OK; it's actually all that counts for ordinary people like you and me.

Few among us is called to such greatness that our names will forever be written in the pages of history. But each of us is called to ministry, a ministry not about us, but about Jesus. And each of us will be remembered, if we focus at least some portion of our lives on building up the kingdom of God.

After all, no one remembers Matthias for anything great. He's just No. 12, added to the group to just fill an empty spot. And yet Matthias had a great ministry. We know Matthias had a great ministry because Matthias was a faithful member of the church that Jesus brought together, the church that we bring together here on behalf of Jesus, doing this and all that we do, as best we can, in remembrance of him.

Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious and loving Creator, sometimes the words just are not there. God, you are so amazing that our words and thoughts of how best to praise you pale in comparison to the splendors of your name.

You are the Almighty, you are the Redeemer, you are grace never-ending and the embodiment of love itself.

And when we come to you in prayer, sometimes words fail us in what to say. Yes, we lift up our concerns, and yet sometimes they seem so small in comparison to all that's going on in our world and in the lives of others.

Lord God, sometimes when we come to you to pray, we are clueless as to what we should ask for. You know the thoughts in our minds and the desires of our hearts, and there are times when they conflict.

Sometimes we want what is not always the best for us, and there are times that we long to hold on to the things we should let go of.

There are times when really the best thing we can do is just pray thy will be done. We pray your will be done for all who grieve the loss of loved ones, knowing that your will is for peace of heart and comfort for their souls.

Bring them this peace and comfort now, O Lord. Bring your healing touch and protective Spirit to bear upon those dealing with illness, injury and disease. Be with all those we continue to keep in our hearts and minds.

In these moments, dear God, we are so very thankful for the lessons of your Son Jesus Christ, for teaching us the words to pray when our own are insufficient. It is in the light of your glory that we now raise our eyes toward heaven and our voices in song for the Lord's Prayer, singing together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive  
our debtors;**

**and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**