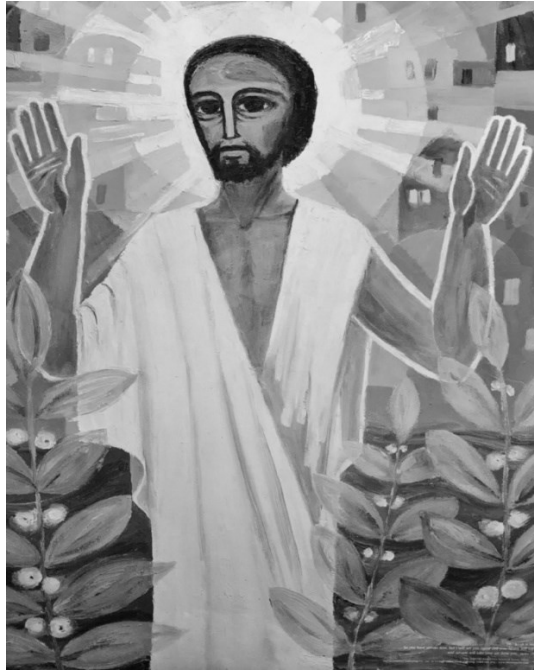


Sunday, 16 May 2021
The Seventh Sunday of Easter (The Sunday after Ascension)

Please use this material with the Easter order of Service



Collects

O God the King of glory,
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven:
we beseech you, leave us not comfortless,
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us
and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Or

Risen, ascended Lord,
as we rejoice at your triumph,
fill your Church on earth with power and compassion,
that all who are estranged by sin
may find forgiveness and know your peace,
to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

Readings

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Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty people) and said, 'Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold 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.'

So one of the men who have accompanied us throughout 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 must become a witness with us to his resurrection.' So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us 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 Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

John 17:6-19

'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I

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have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Sermon

'The one destined to be lost' (John 17: 12)

Judas' betrayal of Jesus caused the early Christian church a considerable headache and embarrassment. For not only did Judas betray Jesus to the Jewish authorities but he then subsequently committed suicide. The sin of betraying the Son of God was then compounded by the mortal sin of taking his own life. So, the question this posed was: why would God ordain Judas to be one of Jesus' close disciples if he also destined him to be the instrument of Jesus' death?

The figure of Judas has been one of endless interest to the church. From a human point of view, just what was it that motivated Judas to behave as he did? From the theological point of view what role does Judas play in salvation and Christian life? Both of today's readings focus on Judas. In Acts the reason for the election of Matthias to the twelve apostles was to fill the gap left by Judas' death and in Jesus' 'High Priestly Prayer' (John 17) the role of the sanctified group of apostles is in stark contrast to 'the one destined to be lost' i.e. Judas.

So, what was it that might have motivated Judas?

Traditionally, as suggested by the Gospels, Judas was motivated by money. John's Gospel says Judas looked after the finances of the disciples but stole money from it (Jn 12:6). Furthermore, he was offered the 30 pieces of silver by the Chief Priests to divulge where Jesus would be just before the Passover so they could arrest him. But it

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was not a lot of money and would hardly be a sufficient motivating factor to betray his friend and master.

Another reason suggested by scholars is that Judas thought Jesus was preaching a revolutionary Kingdom of God and he needed to be prompted into action. Some suggest that his surname 'Iscariot' could mean sword-bearer and that he might have been associated with an anti-Roman underground group called the sicarii or 'dagger bearers'. Perhaps he hoped that by inviting the Temple guard to Gethsemane where Jesus was praying, that Jesus would then use the opportunity to fight, and this would escalate into the dawn of a new age of freedom. Indeed, one of Jesus' disciples did draw a sword, but Jesus told him to put it away.

Or maybe Judas felt that Jesus' controversial teaching was going to result in rounding up torture and execution of all his followers and so his betrayal was to escape this fate.

Finally, he may have felt that he simply did not fit in with the group. Whereas all the other disciples were northerners from Galilee, Judas' surname could also have meant 'man from Kerioth', and Kerioth is in Judaea, southern Palestine. This theory was supported by a very early group of Christians, who felt that the other disciples were jealous of Judas' close relationship with Jesus, and so they used Judas as a scapegoat for their own failure to support Jesus as the messiah. After all, didn't Peter deny Christ three times?

Whatever Judas' motivation, the poet Dante thought Judas' treachery was so evil that he placed him at the very centre of hell along with other arch traitors from history: Brutus and Cassius. In Dante's depiction of hell, it is not scorching hot but freezing cold; Judas is forever frozen in his crime and unable to repent. So, he is in the words of the Gospel, destined to be lost.

My own view is that Judas was not a wicked man, but a lost soul in the sense that he probably had an unrealistic view of what Jesus' gospel message really meant. He expected too much, and his despondency is

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familiar to all those who have perfectionist tendencies and expect too much from this life.

So, it is interesting to note that when Judas left the twelve disciples, they did not immediately replace him. Clearly, they still regarded him with respect as one whom Jesus had chosen. However, after his death the situation was different, so Matthias was elected, using the ancient Jewish custom of choosing priests by casting lots.

The passage from Acts tells us two very important truths about being an apostle. Firstly, the function of an apostle was to witness the resurrection, not just Jesus' life and death. Secondly, that as a Christian the apostle was one who had accompanied Jesus from his baptism. In this way Jesus is to be preached not merely as an impossible ideal but a real and living presence.

This is the essence of Jesus' high priestly prayer when he says of his disciples who will become the apostles after his death and resurrection: 'sanctify them in the truth' (Jn 17:17). To be sanctified means to be set apart from the world of ordinary human affairs so as to be ambassadors of God's kingdom. It is not just the apostles who are called to do so, we all are. And as we have seen in the example of Judas, if we get this role out of proportion and set impossible perfectionist demands on ourselves, we might become overwhelmed, disappointed and even lose faith.

So, with that in mind we must remember that in being witnesses of God's kingdom we are not doing this alone, for as Jesus said 'I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost' (John 17:12).

Michael Wilcockson

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- 1 Rejoice, the Lord is King,
your Lord and King adore;
mortals, give thanks and sing,
and triumph evermore:
*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
rejoice, again I say, rejoice.*

- 2 Jesus the Saviour, reigns,
the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains,
he took his seat above:
Chorus

- 3 His kingdom cannot fail;
he rules o'er earth and heaven;
the keys of death and hell
are to our Jesus given:
Chorus

- 4 He sits at God's right hand
till all his foes submit,
and bow to his command,
and fall beneath his feet:
Chorus

- 5 Rejoice in glorious hope;
Jesus the judge shall come,
and take his servants up
to their eternal home.
*We soon shall hear the archangel's voice
the trump of God shall sound: rejoice!*

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) and John Taylor (1750-1826)
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1 Alleluia, sing to Jesus!
His the sceptre, his the throne;
alleluia, his the triumph,
his the victory alone:
hark, the songs of peaceful Sion
thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus out of every nation
hath redeemed us by his blood.

2 Alleluia, not as orphans
are we left in sorrow now;
alleluia, he is near us,
faith believes, nor questions how:
though the cloud from sight received him,
when the forty days were o'er,
shall our hearts forget his promised,
'I am with you evermore'?

3 Alleluia, bread of angels,
thou on earth our food, our stay;
alleluia, here the sinful
flee to thee from day to day:
Intercessor, Friend of sinners,
earth's Redeemer, plead for me,
where the songs of all the sinless
sweep across the crystal sea.

4 Alleluia, King eternal,
thee the Lord of lords we own;
alleluia, born of Mary,
earth thy footstool, heaven thy throne,
thou within the veil hast entered,
robed in flesh, our great High Priest:
thou on earth both Priest and Victim
in the eucharistic feast.

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1 Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne;
hark, how the heav'nly anthem drowns
all music but its own;
awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless King
through all eternity.

2 Crown him the Virgin's Son,
the God incarnate born,
whose arm those crimson trophies won
which now his brow adorn;
fruit of the mystic Rose,
as of that Rose the stem,
the Root, whence mercy ever flows,
the Babe of Bethlehem.

3 Crown Him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified:
no angel in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends each burning eye
at mysteries so bright.

4 Crown Him the Lord of peace,
whose pow'r a sceptre sways
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,
absorbed in prayer and praise:
his reign shall know no end,
and round his piercèd feet
fair flow'rs of paradise extend
their fragrance ever sweet.

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5 Crown him the Lord of years,
the Potentate of time,
Creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou has died for me;
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.

CCLI Song # 23938

George Job Elvey | Godfrey Thring | Matthew Bridges

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Closing Prayer

Eternal God, giver of love and power,
your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world
to preach the gospel of his kingdom:
confirm us in this mission,
and help us to live the good news we proclaim;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**