

Palm Sunday Monologue
Judas the Betrayed
Matthew 27:1-10

Scripture ends as music underscores for narrator...

Narrator: Judas Iscariot. The very name is synonymous with betrayal. Tradition calls him *The Son of Perdition*, the “son of waste.” Some historical records beyond scripture suggest that Judas was first a disciple of John the Baptist, just like some of the other disciples of Jesus. According to Luke’s Gospel, one of Jesus disciples made this request of him one day, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’” In response Jesus began, “Our Father in heaven...” That is how we got the Lord’s Prayer.

What if that disciple had been Judas Iscariot? Could the one who betrayed Jesus have been the one who wanted to pray like Jesus? Perhaps there is more to Judas than we know. We’ve spent a lot of weeks learning about the Lord’s Prayer, maybe its time we learn about the one who said, “Lord, teach us to pray...”

Narrator walks off as Jesus and disciples pass person entering center stage, smiling and motioning as if talking to each other. Religious leaders enter from rear off to the side. Children then rush on the stage waving palm branches and surrounding Jesus. He smiles and gestures with them, picking some up while religious leaders scoff at the side, and the disciples group together not looking at that please either. Judas steps away from the disciples and begins speaking to the congregation.

Judas: He loved children. No matter what was going on, let a child come into the picture and he was distracted. Whatever he was saying or doing just got dropped. It was like no one in the world was more important to him. Just look at the expression on his face. He loved this! Parents just handed their children over to him. He never even had a background check!

In Greek and Latin the words for children mean “not speaking” (*Ortberg, Who Is This Man, p24*) Children were to be seen not heard, except, most people where I come from would rather keep them unseen as well. Children just weren’t important, except to Him. He made them feel seen and heard.

(pointing at disciples) Now, they’re not liking this a whole lot. They bought into that whole philosophy that children aren’t important. They saw themselves as Jesus’ handlers, you know, making sure he got to where he was most needed. Every known any people who think they know better than Jesus who He needs to help?

Sometimes I wonder if they didn’t like this because they were jealous, as if they were not as important to Him as children were. And if you think children are unimportant, then what does that say about you?

And if you're thinking right now, wait, wasn't I one of this group. I was. And if you're thinking, then why am I pointing out their faults. Didn't I have any? Well, just park your donkey, we'll get to mine. I promise.

(walks over to Pharisees) Right now, let me point out this last group over here, because they're not liking this a whole lot either. Not because they don't like children. They don't like Him. Just look at them. They look like they ate sour dates for breakfast. These guys never smile. Because for them religion was about pointing out what people are doing wrong or might do wrong, and being right was their religion. When you're worried about being right, it's hard to be happy. It's hard to have joy.

(Children begin to be ushered out)

For them, He was someone to be afraid of. Because he didn't conform to their definition of right. He taught a different kind of religion. One that wasn't about rules, but love and lifting people up, and not limiting who you lift up. He lifted up children. He lifted up outcasts. He lifted the poor. He lifted up sinners. He lifted up foreigners. He had a way of making everyone feel seen and heard.

That's why we are all here. He made us feel that way. Now all of these guys were from Galilee, many of them grew up together, not far from Jesus. I always felt like they were kind of an insiders club. This one is Simon. Jesus changed his name to Cephas, Peter, but the funny thing is he never called him that. Ever! He always called him Simon. And when he was mad at him he said it twice, "Simon! Simon!" You loved hearing him call your name once, but you didn't want to hear him call it twice! Simon always thought a lot of himself. Now this one next to him is Simon's brother Andrew. Andrew was actually the first to meet Jesus. He was Jesus best promoter.

Then this one is Nathanael. He's the one who when he heard about Jesus and that he was from Nazareth said with disinterest, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" He was a skeptic, until Jesus started talking to him.

And this one is Thomas. He's the doubter. There's a difference between a skeptic and a doubter. A septic is someone who doesn't believe but acts as if he does. A doubter is someone who really does believe but acts as if he doesn't. That was Thomas.

But the incredible thing is Jesus blesses both. He turns the skeptic into a believer and assures the doubter he really does believe.

And then this last one was Levi. He was a tax collector. *(said sarcastically)* We always had our suspicions about him.

This was just some of our group, but I don't know where they are today.

(Jesus and disciples move over to steps to sit down. The disciples sit around Jesus as he mimics teaching them)

Yes, you guys have sit. This is important. I loved these moments. You see, in your world when a teacher teaches, she or he stands up. That's the position of a teacher in authority. They stand before people. But in my world the teacher sits. That's the position of a teacher. And whenever Jesus was talking, kind of like riffing like he would do talking about the scriptures or traditions, or sometimes just telling stories—Oh man, those were best, His stories—well if he sat down it meant he was in full on teacher mode. And you didn't want to miss these. What he would say in these moments were absolute gems. You would hang on every word.

And that brings to me to...me.

Let me introduce myself by telling you about the first time I heard him call my name. I was a disciple of John the Baptizer. So was Andrew. I started following John because he was a revolutionary. He was shaking things up. He was calling for change. And things needed to change. So many of us saw that. We needed a revolution in our religion. And I thought John was the person to bring that, but he made it clear. He was just the one to get things ready. He was preparing the way for the one to come.

Then one day Andrew and I were with him when John pointed to Jesus and said, "There. That's him. That's the one I've been telling you about. He's the one." So we started walking behind him. He turned around and looked me in the eye and said, "Judas." He had this smile on his face like we were long lost friends. I said, "Do you know me?" He said, "I know *about* you." I said, "Really, what do you know?" He said, "That you're a pretty cool guy." I said, "I'm an accountant." He said, "Yeah, that's not so cool, but you are," and just started laughing.

We asked, "Where are you staying?" Now let me explain something because this is where we could have a communication breakdown. I wasn't asking where are you living? I was asking, how do you live? What are you about? Does that make sense? Nevermind.

His answer was, "Come find out." That was an invitation. We were being invited to consider if we wanted to be His disciples. He had already made up his mind about us. Now he was letting us decide to choose Him. That's how it started.

But it wasn't easy. It became clear very quickly that being with him meant being with all these yahoos. They were all from Galilee. Where I come from we call them country-bumpkins. I was the only Judean. I was raised in the village of Kerioth. That's where my surname comes from. Judas of Kerioth, Judas Iscariot.

But don't assume all these guys got along just because they were from the same area. As I pointed out, one was a tax collector. Another was a Zealot. Zealots lived by a vow to put to death tax collectors. We had to do a lot of trust building exercises on that one. But what was clear is that if you wanted to be near Him, you had to be near the people he attracted. He just brought us together and was like, "You guys figure it out, but if you want to hang with me, you've got to learn how to hang together. That took some doing. But we did the hard work. We became a team.

Well, all except one of us anyway. So let's talk about that. Probably the best place to begin is with the prayer he taught us.

Sometimes his greatest lesson wasn't what he said. It's what he did. I noticed every morning he retreated to places to be alone and pray. So one day I asked him to teach us. John the Baptist had given us a prayer. What's his prayer? Teach us to pray I asked. And he taught a prayer unlike anything I'd ever heard, *"Our Father who is in heaven."* He prayed to God like God was his papa. It was so informal and intimate. It was like he was inviting into his relationship with The Father. He continued, *Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.* Then he continued, *"Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."* That last part made Simon Peter wince.

Now it's at this point that something really strange happened. He paused, looked me straight in the eye and said, *"And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."* (*Judas looks at Jesus as Jesus looks up at Judas*) Why? Why did he look at me like that?

(*Judas starts walking toward Pharisees*) The answer to that question brings me back to these guys. Still looking sour aren't they? It's like their spiritual gift.

As Jesus ministry picked up, their pressure started mounting. At first they just showed up and challenged him in front of people, trying to discredit him. Boy did that strategy backfire! "Tell me, teacher, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" Now that sounds like a perfect trap. If Jesus says, "No." He's trouble with the Romans. If he says, "Yes," he's in trouble with his base.

I love this one! Jesus took the coin you use to pay tax. He asked them, "Whose inscription is on it?" They said, "Caesar's." He said, "Then give to Caesar what's his. And give to God what's His."

The whole "discredit him" theory fell apart. And they would sulk and creep away (**PHARISEES LEAVE**), kind of like they're doing now. They would leave, but it didn't mean they quit. Far from it. And I knew that. I knew how they worked. I'm from Judea, the rest of these guys weren't. They were clueless, but I knew what was going on. These men were afraid and jealous. That's a bad combination when you also have some power.

Rather than try to understand Jesus they figured it would be better just to remove him. It's always easier to remove a people than understand them. But I knew if they understood him like I do, they wouldn't want to remove him. If they just heard the things I heard, they would know he is not a threat to doing what's right. He doesn't violate the Torah. He fulfills it. If they just saw his miraculous works, they would understand that a person could not do such things apart from God.

They needed to know. So I went to see them. I went believing that this was the only way to save him. The religious leaders assured me they just wanted to talk to him, to understand him better, away from the crowds and the people. If I would help them, they would be grateful, they even paid me thirty pieces of silver. Which by the way, do you

know what 30 pieces of silver was worth? It was the going rate of a slave. They bought me like a slave.

Soon after it was the night of Passover. We gathered in an upper room of a house in Jerusalem. Jesus hosted the meal. Now the host always assigns people their place at the table. And you have to understand what that looked like. The table would be just inches off the ground in a U shape so you could see everyone. Then you would lie down leaning on your left side.

The host of the meal typically sat in the second position on the left side if you're racing the table. Now the first position was John, he was the one we all knew loved Jesus especially. But the next position beside the host was for the guest of honor. This is where Jesus placed me. As his honored guest. I couldn't understand why.

Then at one point in the meal when we dipped bread in the charoset remembering our years of bondage in Egypt, he talked about someone at the table betraying him. I just froze. Everyone started if they were the ones? And when he handed me the charoset he whispered, "It's the one whose hands dips with mine." Then he said, "What you're going to do, do quickly."

I quietly got up and left. I realized he knew. He knew what I had been doing. But I took as a good sign. I assumed that meant he would talk to the religious leaders. That he was alright with it. I went to the High Priest's house. They were all there. I told where they would find him later that night. He always took us to Gethsemane. They knew the soldiers wouldn't recognize him. I would to show which one. I told them it would be the one I greet with a kiss. They handed me the money, and I left.

Sure enough, within an hour they were in the garden. I went to him and said, "Greetings Master," and kissed him on the cheek. He said, "Judas..." that's the last time I heard him call my name. He said, "Is it with a kiss you betray me?" And then they grabbed him and put chains on him and dragged him off.

Everyone ran. **(DISCIPLES LEAVE)**

I was alone, and suddenly I realized what I had done. They had no intention of talking with him. They were going to condemn him. They were going to kill him all along. Because of me. They betrayed me. They lied to me. I did what I could. I went back to the chief priest and elders and said "I had betrayed an innocent man," but all they did was scoff and say, "What has that to do with us?"

That's what evil looks like. People hellbent on being right. And it looks like people like me. People who think they know better than others and act on their own. Evil and good intentions walk close beside each other.

I threw the money at their feet. I never wanted it. And I know what you're thinking, "Then why did I take it in the first place?" If my intentions were to help Him, why take money? I don't know. Have you ever done anything you regret, and when asked why you

did it, you just don't know? Was it greed? Weakness? I don't know. The only thing I do know is my regret was greater than I could bear.

I thought over the events that had taken place. His prayer. His looking at me as he said "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." He was warning me. When he had me sit in the place of honor at the Seder Meal of Passover, I thought it was so he could whisper to me and let me know it was okay to do what I was doing. No. He was trying to tell me, don't forget your honor...

(Jesus and Judas lock eyes)

But I did. I forgot my honor. What do you do when you have no more honor? My life wasn't worth living. Did I give up on you too soon? Would you have still forgiven me? Would you have still wanted to sit next to me?

(MUSIC BEGINS)

(After a moment Judas sits in the thrust in sanctuary, center of stage in Chapel. As choir/soloist begin to sing, Jesus walks over behind Judas and bends down and kisses him on forehead and walks off behind cross. Judas remains for a few moments then exits the same)