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*Luke 22:1-23*

*Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.*

*Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.*

*Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.’ They asked him, ‘Where do you want us to make preparations for it?’ ‘Listen,’ he said to them, ‘when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, “The teacher asks you, ‘Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ” He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.’ So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.*

*When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!’ Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.*

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On July 18, 2004, our very own Tim Peck stood in this very pulpit and preached a sermon called “It’s Nothing Against Paul, But…”. (Tim, if you’re curious, that was 7,021 days ago!) In it, Tim reminded us that the stained glass windows behind me have a notable absence. The 12 windows represent 11 male disciples of Christ (I mention “male” because the Gospels are clear that women were equally integral parts of his ministry). The 12th window (on the bottom right, I believe) is inhabited Paul who wasn’t a follower of Christ prior to his death and resurrection. Anyone want to take a guess as to which disciple is notably *absent* in our stained glass windows? Judas Iscariot. And I believe it to be a safe assumption that today’s passage from Luke’s gospel is most likely why he got demoted, discarded, and disinherited.

Our sermon series for the next several weeks is called “Our Money Story.” We’re going to talk about money because it was something that Jesus talked about quite a lot, actually. More than he did about prayer. More than he did about faith. He talked about money a lot and I think that’s because he knew that the way we spend money, collect money, and manage our money both as individuals and as communities has more effect on our neighborliness (or *unneighborliness*) than pretty much anything else. Our money story is complicated. So, in a way, we’re inviting tension into the room because while there are parts of our money story that we joyfully proclaim, there are also parts of our money story that, like Judas, we’d rather keep out of sight and out of mind.

As such, I hope y’all will indulge me as, for today at least, we reinstate Judas as a character in the Bible worthy of our curious gaze.

\*(*Walk to the back of the sanctuary and tape the large sheet of paper with Judas’ name on it beneath the other stained glass windows)\**

It has been said that “money is the root of all evil” and I actually disagree with that notion. I don’t think money is the problem; I think *how we use it* is. Therefore, I would amend the statement to the following: “the hurtful choices we make with our money are the root of all evil.” And, (since choices work like that), then the opposite is equally true: “the *neighborly* choices we make with our money are the root of all *good*.”

I think we can all agree that Judas’ choice wasn’t particularly neighborly. But when it comes to his money story, and ours, I think it’s important that we not be too quick to vilify Judas, to turn him into some malevolent, diabolic character. As Tim mentioned in his sermon 7,021 days ago, the disciples that made the cut to stand before us up there were far from perfect. Peter denied Jesus three times and he still gets a place. Thomas “doubted” and still got in. The other disciples had moments of sin, shortcomings, and shame but somehow we draw the line with Judas and cast him into the outer darkness.

So *why* is it important that we not turn Judas into some sociopathic villain? Because then it gets us off the hook. When we cast Judas into the outer darkness, we rather conveniently don’t have to see *ourselves* in him. When we turn Judas into some caricatured villain like the ones Batman battles, we don’t have to reckon with the parts of *our* money story when we’ve used money in ways that have hurt others.

And those parts of our money story are important things to talk about. Not because this is some shaming exercise or because we need to self-flagellate ourselves in contrition. Rather, it’s so we can widen our scope and joyfully receive the good news that our money story is *not* the sum of our mistakes! You see, because Jesus didn’t see Judas - or anyone, for that matter - as the sum of their mistakes. Jesus, presumably knowing that Judas was about to betray him for a sum of money, nevertheless welcomes Judas to the Table. He breaks bread with him. He offers him the cup of salvation, just like the rest of the disciples. And, to Judas, just like the rest of those gathered, and to us gathered in his name this day, he gave the following instruction: remember.

Remembering is important. Just a few days ago we gathered in this room to give thanks for the life of Afendra Wyatt and remind ourselves of the hope we find in the resurrection. After the service, I went with the family to Forest Lawn to lay Afendra’s remains to rest. As many of you know, Afendra was very proud of her Greek heritage and it was important to her and the family that a Greek Orthodox priest give a final blessing at the graveside. The priest was running 10-15 minutes behind schedule so, rather than sit awkwardly in silence, I invited the family to share with me some of their favorite memories of Afendra.

For about 10 minutes or so, I listened to the family share with me the myriad of ways that Afendra blessed those around her, from her birth in Winston 75 years ago to still insisting on collecting food for A Simple Gesture only a few weeks ago. There was much laughter and gratitude in the air. Once the priest arrived, I told those gathered that it was time to begin the liturgy. And then I corrected myself. I said, actually, y’all already started the liturgy for me. Because remembrance, friends, is what anchors us in God’s promises and reminds us in moments of transition that we belong to God and nothing else.

Jesus looked at Judas and said, “Remember.” I wonder if in that moment Judas realized that that was Jesus also making a commitment to himself. I wonder if in that moment Judas realized that Jesus was reminding *himself* to remember Judas not only for the part of Judas’ money story that would condemn him to such a horrible death, but to remember Judas for the totality of his existence as a beloved child of God. For if God were to only see us for the sum of our mistakes, we would be the most to be pitied. But the waters of our baptism remind us that God’s grace *is sufficient.*

Like every congregation I’ve ever served, our money story is one that has moments of plenty and moments of want. Our money story is days with pews overflowing with young families and years of deficit budgets. Our money story has chapters of wondering if God would provide. Our money story is one of folks sitting in the pews (and standing in the pulpit!) wondering if they are using their money faithfully for the glory of God. Our money story is one that has elements of shame, guilt, and fear. And even in the midst of that, *especially* in the midst of that, Jesus looks to us and says, “Remember.”

Jesus looks to us and says “remember” to remind us that God’s providence is an indelible part of our money story:

* Our money story is when a member of the Mission Committee reaches out to me to say that they were inspired by my sermons addressing the plight of medical debt in this country and asking if we can use a portion of our financial resources to relieve that burden for our neighbors here in Greensboro.
* Our money story is when someone calls me and says, “Pastor, I’d like to make a contribution to our Deacon’s Fund so this congregation can be a blessing to our neighbors who are struggling in this ruthless economy."
* Our money story is the dedication of our staff and volunteers who keep this congregation running so that we can be the good news in the neighborhood.
* Our money story is when we started this year anticipating a $100,000 negative budget and, as a result, asked the congregation to raise $75,000 in honor of our 75th anniversary, *and then y’all instead give $100,000.*

And, y’all, our money story isn’t over. There are still chapters to be written and you and I are the ones God has called to write them. What will the pages of that story hold? For you? For your family? For your workplace? For this congregation? Sometimes the worst position we can ever place ourselves in is when we believe that our money story is a forgone conclusion with no possibility for grace, abundance, and generosity.

When Jesus looked to Judas and said, “remember,” I think it was Jesus’ way of saying to his friend, “Your money story doesn’t have to end like this. There’s a better way. A kinder way.” I think it was Jesus’ way of saying to Judas, “What’s wrong with your decision to betray me for money isn’t just about *me*. It’s about the community God is calling us to be. The economy of the world may trade souls on a daily basis for the benefit of financial gain, *but that’s not how we do things here*. My beloved Judas, my friend, your money story doesn’t have to end like this. Remember.”

Y’all, remember this day that Judas wasn’t a bad person. He was a good person who made a bad choice. And we are gathered here this day as good people who have, at times, made bad choices. That’s why we gather each Sunday and begin our worship together with a prayer of confession. A prayer of confession that ends not with a note of condemnation but a promise of grace. My guess is that you’re here today because you remember that you’re in need of that promise of grace and you want to share that promise with others.

To quote my friend, Tim, “It’s nothing against Paul, but….” I think there are many other folks who deserve to be up there behind me. Judas. You. Me. Women. Children. Each of us belong up there as members of the tapestry of God’s children. And all of us together are writing our money story. As Jesus turns to us as bids us “remember,” let us hear that voice in every decision we make as we write that story together in God’s name.

In the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us, God’s children, say: **Amen.**