

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO GIVE ME?

“Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” (Matt. 26:14-15a)

Message:

Tonight’s Gospel lesson contains a faithless question and a description of the greatest crime ever committed. It’s the story of Judas.

Judas went to the chief priests of the temple and asked, *“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?”* *“What will be my reward if I betray Jesus?”* The question is: what could have possibly brought Judas to the point of doing this unthinkable thing?

Well, what do we know about Judas? We know that Jesus had chosen him as one of the twelve disciples he kept close to Himself. We know that he had been privileged to live for nearly three years as an intimate companion of the Son of God. We know that he had seen Jesus perform miracles that only God could perform: restoring sight to the blind; giving the lame the ability to walk; cleansing lepers of their disease; even raising the dead to new life.

If evidence of the senses and the power of reason could have convinced him, Judas should have known beyond any doubt that Jesus was the Lord. Even more—he had been selected for the unique honor of being an apostle: one of those whom Jesus would send out into the world to announce that the long-awaited Kingdom of God had arrived. Yet he traded all this for thirty pieces of silver! Why?

Many theories have been put forth to explain what motivated Judas to do what he did. Was he looking for a different kind of leader than Jesus--someone who would lead a revolt against Rome rather than one who said, “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s?” Was he looking for a warrior-king like David? Or a guerrilla fighter like Samson? Maybe he was looking for a social reformer—someone who would redistribute all the wealth and impose social justice? Or was Judas simply driven by the love of money? After all, he served as treasurer for the disciples and we are told that he helped himself to some of their money from time to time. Any of these are possible, but the truth is, we just don’t know.

Like other evil characters in history—Caligula, the madman who became emperor of the Roman empire; Rasputin, the evil counselor to the House of Romanoff; Stalin, who allowed twenty million Ukrainians to starve to death so that he could impose State farming; Hitler, who murdered six million Jews—Judas’s real motives remain hidden to this day. All we know for sure is that there is no rational way to explain what he did. Judas rejected eternal life in paradise with God and chose a path which led to eternal torment in hell with Satan. Jesus had said, “What would it profit a man to gain the whole world in exchange for his soul?” Judas sold his soul for thirty pieces of silver!

Soon after he had handed Jesus over to the temple guards Judas realized what he had done, flung the thirty pieces of silver back into the temple and hung himself, his intestines spilling out onto the ground.

His big mistake was that when he asked, “What are you willing to give me?”—he asked the wrong person.

If he had asked Jesus, “What are you willing to give me?”--Jesus would have given him the same answer he gives to all who ask Him that question: “I will give you forgiveness of all your sins and eternal life with me in heaven.” Jesus knew that our problem is sin and that what we need more than anything else in the world is forgiveness.

We all were born with the Judas-seed in our bones and blood. We are steeped in sin from the moment we are conceived. Disease and death are encoded into our genes. Our powers of observation and reason are so clouded that we see sin as attractive and exciting rather than ugly and repulsive. We allow sin to control our wills and govern our choices. What we need is to be set free of our love for sinning.

In Jesus’ own words, we are bad trees that bear bad fruit and we need to be changed into good trees that bear good fruit. We need to be changed from what we are into what God can make of us. And the only One who can do that is Jesus and the only way he could do it was to die to atone for our sins.

God said to Adam, “On the day you eat of it you will surely die.” Only death can atone for sin: there can be no forgiveness of sins apart from the shedding of blood. So Jesus—that is God Himself—offered up His body and blood to purchase forgiveness of sins for all mankind. He went to Golgotha and there he was crucified. But the story doesn’t end at Golgotha.

At His last supper with his disciples, Jesus bequeathed his body and blood as an inheritance to all who place their faith in Him.

So when we go to the altar tonight, it will be to receive our legal inheritance as children of our heavenly Father: the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

This is why the Lord’s Supper is the center of worship! When we commune with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, He physically enters our lives and **fuses** Himself with us, inextricably binding us together in our mutual destiny, which is eternal life in heaven. Just as we were joined with Jesus in our baptism, we are alloyed with him in Holy Communion. Listen to the words of St. Paul:

“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may walk in newness of life [for] If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.”

Over the years, I’ve had fun asking members of the churches I’ve served what the word “testament”--as in “Old Testament” and “New Testament” actually means. Usually they say it means something like “testimony” or “witness” or “proclamation.” Nice words, but

they're not what "testament" means. A testament is a will, a legal instrument that transfers one's property to an heir upon one's death.

You've all heard of someone's "last will and testament." So when Jesus said during the last supper, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is poured out for you"-- He was making out His will. He was bequeathing His lifeblood to His disciples so that He could live in them forever. When we commune, we become blood brothers of Jesus Christ and when we die, we will be united with our Brother at the right hand of God, our Father.

So when you ask Jesus, "*What are you willing to give me?*" His answer is, "*Take, eat, this is my body. Take, drink, this is my blood, shed for you for the remission of sins.*" The Lord's supper is more than a symbol or a remembrance: it is a sacrament, as the Bible makes clear. Paul writes: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not this bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?"

In the early church, communion was referred to as the "medicine of immortality." And so it is. Tonight and on every occasion in the future when you partake of the Lord's body and blood, may this eating and drinking strengthen and preserve you in true faith unto life everlasting. Amen.