

Many members. One body united in Christ.

Sunday of the Passion
St. Matthew 26:20-35
29 March, Anno Domini 2026

Beloved disciples of Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

We all want to believe that we would never do what Judas did. It seems unthinkable that one of the twelve whom Jesus had personally chosen to serve as apostles, the chief bearers of the Gospel into the world after Jesus' ascension, a man who had spent three years listening to Jesus preach and teach, witnessing miracle after miracle, could then turn away and conspire with Jesus' enemies to arrest him in secret and bring about the destruction of God's Son for no more than thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave.

When Jesus spoke those sad and chilling words "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me," the disciples (except Judas) were dumbfounded. But their repeated question to Jesus betrays them. Each disciple knew in the back of his mind that it very well could be him. If not, they wouldn't have asked "Is it I, Lord?" They all had their doubts. All of them had wondered at times if they were following a crazy person. And who knew what pressure they might be under to betray Jesus. What if they or their family were threatened with ruin, torture, or even death? Would they be able to withstand the pressure or would they cave in order to save their life in this world or even just avoid pain or discomfort? Even Peter, James, and John, the inner inner circle, asked if it would be them. Purposefully or not, they were at least honest. The possibility existed that any one of the apostles would be the one to betray Jesus.

And while they didn't all profit off his capture, they all scattered from Jesus in the garden so that they didn't also end up bound standing before the Sanhedrin. They wouldn't stand with Jesus to defend Him as the insults were being hurled at Him or as He was being falsely accused of all kinds of things. And Peter who vehemently insisted that he would never deny Jesus even if it meant dying, withered under the harsh interrogation of a servant girl, calling down curses on himself as he insisted that he had no idea who Jesus was. And what was his reward? Only a conscience filled with agony and fear and maybe, though that remained to be seen, a little more time in this world.

What is our price? For what will we pretend that we aren't Christians? What does

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the world have to promise to give us so that we will be embarrassed by what God says? What pleasure has to be dangled in front of us for us to turn away from the means of Jesus' grace and run back into the dark world seeking safety and ease? The sad truth that we must all confess is, sometimes, it doesn't take much at all. Sometimes we flee from Christ at the possibility that we might get something before there is even a threat. The world just looks like it is having more fun or enjoying more success and we envy those who aren't Christians because no one is telling them that they have to deny their desires, or go to church, or tithe, or pray. The offer of a bigger paycheck, friendship with those who are of the world, the freedom to watch and listen to filth and perversion, not being called old-fashioned or prudish or unscientific, time with unbelieving family, a chance at scholarship money or a better position on the team, the kingdoms of the world and their glory - these and anything else your heart desires the devil will be pleased to offer if you will just set aside the things of Christ and seek first the things of the world and their glory. Besides, you'll always have opportunity to repent and return to Jesus... won't you?

And we have done just that on more than one occasion. We have betrayed Jesus into the hands of the wicked world to mock Him and spit on Him so that we could have our 30 pieces of silver. We have fled away in fear when standing and confessing the truth of God's Word might have cost us friends, family, or opportunities. We have crept around trying to keep our connection to Jesus unnoticed in the name of prudence. "Is it I, Lord?" "You, have said so."

And, Lord willing, our consciences have suffered for it. Judas and Peter both suffered deep agony over what they had done, as we all should and rightly so. But only one of them ran to the tomb on Easter morning. Judas had, sadly, given up faith. He had no hope that Jesus could or would forgive his betrayal. But his despair wasn't rooted in reality. He denied all of the preaching and teaching that he heard from Jesus and concluded that there was no mercy available to him. And in that despair and unbelief he chose to take his own life and suffer God's eternal wrath for his sin, even though that was not God's desire for him. Jesus would have gladly forgiven him. But Judas believed that his sin was bigger than Jesus.

Peter, by God's grace, though filled with the same terror as Judas, had hope that the same Jesus who had forgiven the sins of so many others would forgive him too. He remembered Jesus words "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." He came trembling back to the upper room with the other disciples looking for God's mercy.

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Weep over your sin but do not despair like Judas. Jesus was arrested, falsely accused and condemned, and nailed to the cross to atone for Judas, for Peter, and for you. He faithfully confessed where we have so often faithlessly denied. He chose your eternal salvation over His own comfort, over the world's approval and pleasure. He will not deny you. He will not betray you. He will not flee from you. He will forgive you and restore you. He will give you His Holy Spirit and stand beside you so that you might boldly and joyfully confess before the world His saving and precious Name. Whatever the world promises to give you if you deny Jesus, it is lying. It has nothing of value to give you. Jesus has come and brings you salvation, the hope of eternal life, the forgiveness of all your sins, a conscience at peace with God. Throw down your thirty pieces of silver at the devil's feet and come take your place in the Lord's house among your true brothers and sisters who await the inheritance of eternal kingdom. Join Peter and the other forgiven sinners around the cross of your salvation and the table of His mercy.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.