

**Tuesday in Holy Week**

**St. Peter's, Petersfield**

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

**Compline**

**Reading: John 12: 20-36**

Judas Iscariot. The man from Kerioth, a village not far from Jerusalem, hence he was a Judaeen, unlike the other eleven disciples from up north in Galilee. The Jewish north/south divide features throughout the gospels and particularly so in the Passion story where Peter's Galilean accent gives him away. Perhaps for this reason Judas was always regarded by the other disciples as a bit of an outsider. Judas was lurking in the gospel story of the meal at Bethany that we heard yesterday evening and tomorrow we shall hear him featuring again at the Last Supper. His feet too are washed by Jesus. That must have been a particularly infuriating episode for Judas after his outburst at Bethany when Mary had anointed Jesus' feet with that precious oil of nard. He had hoped that Jesus might have approved of his sentiment about waste and giving instead to the poor. But Jesus had given him a reply that seemed to confirm to Judas that Jesus and he were on completely different wavelengths. This was the last straw. Mary, it seems, has given Jesus the idea about washing feet, the servant's job. Hardly what you expect a Messiah to do! Then the next day after the Bethany meal on the Saturday evening had seen the extraordinary spectacle of that "Royal Procession" into Jerusalem with the crowd going wild in expectation and chanting messianic acclamations, which particularly rattled the Jewish authorities, since they feared another uprising, which the Romans would soon deal with in their usual brutal fashion. But then that procession had sort of petered out at the temple. (Remember that in John's Gospel the cleansing of the temple, when Jesus overturns the tables of the

moneychangers, which occurs in Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospels at this point of the story, happens as a separate incident and on a different visit to Jerusalem early on in Jesus' ministry in chapter 2). Here in John chapter 12, Jesus talks with the crowd that had come to cheer him and talks about walking in the light and not in the darkness. He then departs and hides himself away from the crowd. Just what kind of Messiah was Jesus intending to be?

This evening's gospel passage follows on the Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem, which in turn follows the Bethany episode. Just as that embarrassing incident with the perfume at Bethany and the ambiguity of that wretched donkey ride into Jerusalem seems to have confirmed for Judas that Jesus was not the man for him, so the arrival of Greek speaking Jews from the Diaspora, in Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, and keen to see this figure about whom everyone was talking, seems to have acted as a catalyst for Jesus to realize the course his actions must now take. The scene is now set. Jesus is now clear where matters are likely to lead. Judas is now clear what he must do. He must seek an opportunity to force Jesus into some sort of confrontation with the chief priests and other figures in the Jewish establishment. This was showdown time. Either those hierarchs must endorse Jesus and thus proclaim him Messiah, the longed-for anointed one, or Jesus must overthrow their authority and lead a Maccabean style revolt against the tyrant Roman state authority. Judas was soon to be a very disappointed man, bitterly disenchanted. He was not only caught up in the sordid half-light politics of revolutionary movements but also betrayed by his own weakness and his grubby vulnerability to a bribe. Blood money. Caught out by the failure of his scheme to bring about this desired encounter between Jesus and the authorities and filled with self-loathing and disgust he could see no way out except to take his own life.

But before Judas leaves on that attempt to set up the confrontation with the Jewish establishment, Jesus breaks bread at Passover and Judas is among those present. In John's gospel there is no direct mention of the Institution of the Eucharist, yet it is presupposed. Indeed the whole gospel is Eucharistic: *I am the bread of life* and *I am the vine etc.* According to the other gospels all the disciples, including Judas Iscariot, receive the bread and the wine given by Jesus at the Last Supper. John does not mention this as such but presupposes it. He goes on to say that Judas is given a further morsel of bread by Jesus which precipitates Judas leaving on his mission to inform on Jesus to the Jewish authorities.

Is there hope for Judas? All the other disciples who also let Jesus down so badly when he was arrested are restored in the resurrection encounters with the risen Lord. Is Judas beyond redemption? Does his remorse and despairing death at his own hand put him beyond the atoning power of the Cross? I do not believe so. Judas has had to bear the collective guilt of the first and subsequent generations of Christian writers, St John included. His very name, Yehuda, from which Judaism gets its name, has meant he has become and artistically has frequently been portrayed as the archetypal Jew who rejected Jesus and bears the blame for his death. The resulting antisemitism has been a vile stain on Christian history and still lingers in our culture. Is it possible to rehabilitate Judas? He had a choice. He chose disastrously and felt totally cut off from any hope. There seemed no way back. But Christ's redeeming power lies also beyond the grave, for we believe, as we say in our creeds, that Christ "*descended into hell*" (meaning the place of the dead) beyond time and space. Who knows how the redeeming love of Christ may present Judas with another choice about his possible eternity? I cannot say. But I hope so. For there is also *this* way of looking at matters: was not Adam's sin necessary? Do we not

proclaim before the Paschal Candle the great paean of Easter Praise as we shall hear on Easter morning, using the words of St Irenaeus, *“O happy fault! O necessary sin of Adam that brought us so great a salvation!”* Felix culpa! Without Judas things might have turned out very differently. He unwittingly had an instrumental role in the reversal of Adam’s sin.

It is so easy to paint characters as black or white. But it is too simplistic. It is not a case in the gospel stories of goodies and baddies (I shall leave it perhaps to another time to do a makeover on Herod and Pilate!), rather that there is that frail human mix of nobility and vileness: all are bad for all have sinned and betrayed, yet all are good for all are created in God’s image and are therefore worth saving. For us and our salvation Christ laid down his life. There is something of the Judas in us all, but the grace of God in Christ can redeem that part of us too.