

Mark 14:17 When it was evening, he came with the twelve. **18** And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” **19** They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, “Surely, not I?” **20** He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. **21** For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

Mark 14:26 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. **27** And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written,
‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.’

28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” **29** Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.” **30** Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” **31** But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all of them said the same.

Today we find ourselves just one week down the road from Easter 2021. I was very satisfied to talk about what was said last Sunday, but as things get behind us, I find myself always wanting to look back to make sure that we didn't miss something really important. I realized a few days ago that there was something that I had raised in a sermon either back in the 1980's or 1990's, which was a while ago. I thought it was something that was especially worthy of taking a closer look. So today, with no memory of what was said 30 years ago, I wanted to dig into this. **Judas & Peter.** These two men have some special things in common. They are both disciples. But much more than that, they both betray Jesus in very big ways. But they both end up with drastically different futures. I think we need to explore this, because there is something there that we need to understand. Why does Peter go on to be the Rock on which Jesus builds his church? And why does Judas have no future but to die at his own hands? They were both serious betrayers.

We can see from our lesson this morning that while they were having the Last Supper, Jesus makes a terrible announcement: *One*

who is sitting at the table will in fact betray him. This is awful. Not only is it a terrible thing to mention, but the context matters so much here. These men are friends. Much more than that, they are eating together, which is a sign of their bond. In their culture if you eat together, you are sharing life together. You are showing that you support each other. You are really **together**. This is why certain people would be critical of Jesus *for eating with sinners*. They are having Passover together. And now this terrible news. And each one says “*No, it cannot be me!*”

We are told something else in Matthew, which we didn't see this morning. Judas actually goes to see some chief priests from the Temple in Jerusalem, which is very corrupt. They don't like Jesus because he is critical of them. Jesus predicts that the Temple will be destroyed, as it is until this very day. Judas goes to them and literally asks “What are you willing to give me if I betray him to you?” The offer to him is 30 pieces of silver. This is actually not much, with 1 piece of silver being worth maybe \$5 or so. They are going to offer Judas \$150 to betray his friend to them. It is not like they offer him \$150,000 ! They pay him the \$150, and Judas goes on his way.

We cannot forget that Judas literally does this terrible thing. But we usually do not hear the rest of the story. After he sees Jesus arrested and condemned to be crucified by the Romans, he realizes that he has made the most terrible mistake of his life. It says that he goes back to the same chief priests. It says that he REPENTS! He gives back the money. And he confesses “***I have sinned by betraying innocent (or righteous) blood.***” These chief priests basically say “So what?” They don't care. One less trouble maker, as far as they are concerned. Then without any detail or drama, we

are told that Judas takes his own life with a rope. So that is where we must leave Judas, very tragically.

But what about this other guy, the one we call Peter? We need to understand something about this fisherman from Galilee. His actual name is Shimon, Simon, a common Hebrew name. But Jesus gives him a knick name. Now he is Kephias (or Kepha) in Aramaic, or in Greek he will be Petros; both names mean ROCKY! Is Peter a big strong guy, a tough guy, who is afraid of nothing? That seems to be the case. But this Rocky is going to get bad news of his own. He will blurt out that even if everyone else betrays Jesus, he will never do it, and in fact, he will be willing to go and die with Jesus. And Jesus tells him “You will deny me twice before the rooster crows three times.” This will take place, just as Jesus said.

As tragic as it is that Judas hangs himself, this story of Peter in the dark is maybe just as heartbreaking. Jesus is inside a building, being questioned by the local town council of sorts. Peter is outside. Let’s remember, he is probably a big strong guy. And what happens? A teen-age girl who is a servant to the high priest walks up to Peter and says “Hey, this guy is one of them.” And Peter says “Nope. You’re mistaken.” The she tells him a second time. “He is one of that group (the disciples of Jesus).” Now he starts to get mad. And then others say “You ARE one of them, because you talk like them!” Peter begins to swear. This is why it is called “swearing.” He basically says “I swear to God, I don’t know him!” This is the same man who a month earlier at Caesarea Philippi said to Jesus “You are the Messiah!” He seemed to know who Jesus was then, right?

As if on cue, the rooster crows, as the morning is coming. Peter hears the rooster, breaks down crying, and he runs away into

the dark. According to the Gospel of Mark, our original Gospel story, he is not seen again. He heads back to Galilee to resume fishing.

When I look at these two men, first I see Judas, and I see a man who made a terrible mistake, but who **REPENTED**, which must count for something. He knows what a terrible thing he has done. Too often people will not admit what they have done, but they deny it. Judas does not deny it. He tells this group of Temple people that he is guilty of betraying an innocent man, and a righteous man. He gives the money back. They don't care. So Judas, in silent despair, goes out and ends his life. He will be replaced as one of the Twelve Disciples shortly after.

Could Peter have gone out and done the same thing? He could have done it. But he must have believed something that made all the difference. He refused to believe that despair can have the last word in life. And this is what I think we need to know. **This is what we must know.** There is a famous quote from an early Church Father names Iranaeus who will become a saint in the Church. He has great quotes. Here is one of them: *“It is not so much our sins that destroy us, but despair...”* Sins often can be repaired. But **Despair** is one of the most awful words in the English language. Despair literally means “away from hope.” There can be nothing worse than to be without hope, believing that there is no hope at all. Frankly, this is why many people drink and take drugs. They have come to a terrible place where they believe there is no hope. And there can be no place that is worse. Have some mercy on those held hostage by drinks and drugs. Lots of them have tragically come to

the place where they believe that there is no hope. Judas must have been in that place. But not Peter. Why not Peter as well?

We have picture here of the most magnificent place I have seen, built by human hands, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. At the entrance there is a giant statue of Peter. I touched his foot for good luck, because everyone else was! Something in Peter kept him from despair. What was that special thing? I wish we could put that into a vaccine to put into everyone's arms. He must have had hope. He must have believed that he really was loved, and that he was never beyond redemption. That is what I hope we will all believe. No matter what happens, no matter what mistakes we might make, even if they are profound, we cannot let ourselves believe that we can ever be in that place where there is no hope. Judas and Peter both were betrayers, both let Jesus down in very big ways. But Peter had something that poor Judas did not have. There must be hope. And hope must be a part of our faith, our worldview. God loves us all, and we are of ultimate value to God. God already paid the ultimate price for our redemption, to buy us back from evil and brokenness. God knows our names and our lives. No one is beyond redemption. So there is always hope. Sins cannot destroy us. But despair can. May God's love keep us from despair, and all people. Let this be our daily prayer, in Jesus's name. AMEN.