



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

**Sermon for Easter 7**

May 12, 2024

# Three Ways Judas Can Help You

## Acts 1:12–26

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup> All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

<sup>15</sup> In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, <sup>16</sup> "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup> For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." <sup>18</sup> (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. <sup>19</sup> And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

<sup>20</sup> "For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

" 'May his camp become desolate,  
and let there be no one to dwell in it';

and

" 'Let another take his office.'

<sup>21</sup> So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." <sup>23</sup> And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup> And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." <sup>26</sup> And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.



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Today's first reading speaks of what happened to Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, who set the stage for our Lord's death and resurrection. He died an ugly death. Suicide is always ugly. It is, after all, a sin against the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, for God alone has the authority to give and take life.

But there's more to Judas' story than this disgusting event. God could have allowed Judas' name and memory to be wiped away and forgotten for all eternity. But He didn't, did He. No. God wrote the story of Judas into sacred Scripture for our blessing and benefit. Judas actually helps us – helps *you* in your walk with Christ – in at least three ways.

The first help Judas gives us is a warning. Today's first reading is from the Book of Acts, which was written by St. Luke. As you may recall, Luke also wrote a Gospel. His Gospel is all about repentance. He records that John the Baptist came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). He's also the only Gospel writer who reports the fear-inspiring words of Jesus, "Unless you repent, you will all . . . perish" – a message that Jesus emphasized by saying it twice in the same sermon (Luke 13:3, 5).

The book of Acts is also about repentance (Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8). Judas Iscariot is almost a sermon illustration on repentance – or, rather, what happens when you refuse to repent. Not only did he die an ugly death; he also died needlessly, unrepentantly. That is to say, he died believing that Jesus' love and forgiveness didn't matter. Beloved, *never* allow yourself to think this way. Learn from Judas. Be helped by Judas. Be *warned* by Judas.

For in today's first reading, Peter said about Judas, "He was numbered among us and was allotted his share of this ministry." These words indicate that Judas had his full allotment of all God's gifts, just as the other disciples did. He heard the same words of forgiveness and life from Jesus that the others heard; he participated in the miracles of Jesus, as the others did; he ate the same body and blood given for the forgiveness of sins that the other disciples did. Judas was also painfully aware of his sins (Matthew 27:4). But, *unlike* the other disciples, Judas simply refused to believe that Jesus could forgive someone like him.

Oh, dear friends, learn from Judas. Benefit from Judas. Never allow yourself to become so overwhelmed by the weight of your sins that you fool yourself into thinking there's no hope for you. Never fall into the Judas-trap of thinking your sin is greater than Jesus. Jesus was far greater than Judas' sin and He's far greater than yours. Jesus died even for Judas, just as He did for you. Jesus' blood fully covered Judas' sin, just as it covers yours. Neither Judas' sins nor your sins are too much or too deadly for the Lord of Life.



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The second help Judas gives is this: He shows you that a wicked pastor or preacher cannot stand in the way of God's gifts to you. What does this mean?

1. God's forgiveness is not invalidated or weakened, should that forgiveness be pronounced to you by a pastor who's a sinner in need of forgiveness himself. Because, you know what? I don't care who your pastor is – he could have been Martin Luther himself – he's going to be a sinner in need of forgiveness. In the days of the Old Testament, the High Priest, whose duty it was to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people, had to offer sacrifice for his own sins first. Apart from Christ, there are no sinless human beings. What does this say, then, about Judas? As Peter said in today's first reading: Judas "had his share in this ministry."

2. In Holy Communion, you truly receive Christ's body, blood, forgiveness, and life, even if that Communion should be served by an unrepentant, unbelieving man. Remember: Judas was one of those twelve disciples who served miraculous bread to 5,000 men. His hands touched and distributed that bread, which Jesus had taken, blessed, broken, and given to His disciples in a manner very much like Holy Communion. Those whom Judas served still received a miraculous meal, even though Judas had served it.

3. Holy Baptism is truly a "washing of rebirth" (Titus 3:5), even if you might have been baptized by the hand of a wicked priest. Judas was fully included in these words from St. John: "Jesus Himself did not baptize, but only His disciples [did]" (John 4:1). According to this, Judas baptized people into God's gift of eternal life. On the power and authority of these words – for it all comes down to the power and authority of the Word, does it not? – we conclude that those Judas baptized received the very same gift of God. The fact that Judas did it does not disqualify it, for God's gifts are greater than the one who distributes them to you!

That is a comfort and benefit that Judas provides. "He had his share in this ministry." That means you are fully forgiven, even if I myself should refuse the same forgiveness that I preach (which I don't; I cherish it, just as you should). Judas "had his share in [the] ministry." That means God's gifts to you are truly *His* gifts to you, gifts that are full of forgiveness, salvation, and life — and no one can stand in the way of His gifts, not even an unrepentant pastor! Judas "had his share in this ministry" because God will even use sinful men in His earnest desire to give you salvation and assurance and peace.

The third help Judas provides is a cheerful view of the future. He shows us that God always provides, one way or another. Listen again to our first reading:



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"One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us — one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Here's the point: no pastor or preacher is irreplaceable. God's living Word marches faithfully forward, dependent upon no individual man. Where Judas ceases, Matthias picks up. Where one pastor vacates a pulpit, another fills it. This is our God's good pleasure and His careful design.

Today's First reading tells a dark story, but even the dark places in God's Word will shine the light of Christ for us. Our gracious Father will even put the labors of evil men to good and healthy use for us. He hitched Judas Iscariot to the cart of our salvation. Judas teaches each and every Christian to draw a careful line between the Gospel of God and the one who delivers it. Judas assures us that forgiveness and salvation are ours forever in Christ, and no one can get in the way of it. Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen