

Lent talk 2019. Holy Trinity

Judas

The Bonfire Carol from Somerset

*There were twelve bonfires burning in a field
Judas Judas
there was one for Peter, there was one for John
every disciple he had one
Judas Judas
there was one for James who died by the sword
the biggest and the best was for our dear Lord*

*burn burn Judas, burn slow
bright bright bright for our dear Lord's sake
burn slow for Judas
Judas was a red-headed man*

*There was one for Judas and it stood all alone
Judas Judas
down by the marish and it smoked away
it smoked all night and it smoked all day
Judas Judas
'twas a proper green smother for all to see
but the fire burned sweet for our Lord on the Tree*

*burn burn Judas, burn slow
bright bright bright for our dear Lord's sake
burn slow for Judas
Judas was a red-headed man*

This traditional song refers to the ancient custom of making twelve fires of hedge cuttings and one apart, of green weeds and rubbish—“That one be for Judas—he burn slow.”

New Zealand Prime Minister – has said that she will not use name of perpetrator of the terrible violence in two mosques in Christchurch. He wants notoriety – she won’t give it to him.

Perhaps the best example of notoriety is Judas..

Judas’ name , Even those who have nothing to do with church still know all too well what is meant if we are accused of being a *Judas*, and none of us wants to hear it.

In a magazine interview three years ago, Bob Dylan recalled being publicly branded Judas by an outspoken fan during a notorious 1965 concert at Manchester’s Free Trade Hall. Dylan’s betrayal had been to swap his acoustic guitar for an electric one. All those years on, he was still furious. “Judas, the most hated name in human history,” he said. “If you think you’ve been called a bad name, try and work your way out from under that.”

But it’s not just the name:

Judas kiss– In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is praying with some of his disciples after the Last Supper – Judas arrives with soldiers, goes up to Jesus and kisses him – he has told the soldiers -“the one I kiss is the man”.



Such a terrible conjunction of an embrace – a kiss – and betrayal.

Thirty pieces of silver

Judas' payment for telling the authorities how to find Jesus, has become a phrase for any reward for betrayal – dirty money



Judas Tree The spring blooms of a Judas tree, *Cercis siliquastrum*, which always appear at the end of Lent. It is an unusual tree—According to legend this is the tree on which Judas hanged himself after betraying Jesus, after which the white flowers turned red with his blood and shame. Yet it is also known as the ‘Love tree,’ reflecting the Lord’s love for us all, including Judas, such that He annually allows Judas his “moment of glory” too, even as a reminder of his betrayal.”



Two accounts of how Judas died...

Gospel account: – suicide – he hanged himself on tree, in the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Peter contradicts the gospel account of a suicide. “As you know,” he tells a crowd of 120, including the surviving apostles, “he [Judas] fell headlong and burst open and his entrails poured out” (Acts 1:18).

What Peter implies here is that the devil, who had possessed Judas in Luke and John's accounts of the betrayal, was now exiting the traitor's body.

Note that possession by the devil is not mentioned in Matthew's or in Mark's Gospel.

Medieval artists had a struggle to conflate the two different versions of Judas's death. At the ancient French Catholic shrine of Notre-Dame des Fontaines, is a fresco by Giovanni Canavesio (1490s) - a horrifying depiction of Judas. Judas hangs from a rope, looking deranged, eyes flashing madly, half in fear, half in threat, his hair a spiky mop.



The Medieval Church used Judas name for control – terrifying people into being faithful. But also, Judas became **the scapegoat for the whole Jewish race**, who were held responsible for Jesus death –

Hebrew Jehuda (Judas) Jehudi(Jew).

Iscaiot – in Hebrew is translated as “Is-Qeriot”, or “man of Qeriot”, a town in Judea, part of the seat of the Jewish Establishment.

The earliest Christians, of course were all Jews (as was Jesus) and at first, Gentiles were only allowed to become Christians if they first became Jews. The Christian Jews held to their Jewishness for decades after Christ’s death. Then a change occurred. The Great Jewish Revolt towards the end of the first century AD, resulted in a total rout of the Jews, and in the burning of the Temple at Jerusalem—which was the centre of the Jewish religion. The followers of Christ began to feel that it would be prudent to make friends with the Romans, by disassociating themselves from the Jews. Anyway, most of their converts were now coming from among the Gentiles. There was no reason any more to see themselves as a Jewish sect.

So the Christian Church began to claim that it was itself a religion, distinct from—even opposite to—Judaism. One way to make the break absolute, was to identify Judaism with a special evil, and this is where Judas came in. In early Christian

documents, he is described like something out of a monster movie.

Here is a portrait of him that has been attributed to Papias, a second century bishop in Asia Minor:

Judas was a dreadful, walking example of impiety in this world, with his flesh bloated to such an extent that he could not walk through a space where a wagon could easily pass. . . . His eyelids were so swollen that it was absolutely impossible for him to see the light and his eyes could not be seen by a physician, even with the help of a magnifying glass, so far had they sunk from their outward projection. His private parts were shamefully huge and loathsome to behold and, transported through them from all parts of his body, pus and worms flooded out together as he shamefully relieved himself.

St. Jerome spoke of Jews as “*the sons of Judas*”?—and much was made of the love of money that prompted Judas to betray Jesus, and that attribute was now transferred onto all Jews. St John Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, preached about the Jews: “*Shall I tell you of their plundering, their covetousness, their abandonment of the poor, their thefts, their cheating in trade?*”

Christianity carried on holding the Jews responsible for the heinous crime of deicide until fairly recently (right up to 1965 in the case of Catholicism), and this has been one of the foundation

stones of Christian anti-Semitism right down to the 20th century. The Nazis used the figure of Judas in their propaganda, always depicted as a hideous Jewish stereotype.

The story of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas gave a moral and religious rationale to anti-Jewish sentiment, and that's what made it persistent and vicious. (Elaine Pagels)

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the churches collectively examined their consciences about the part Christian anti-Semitism had played in the deaths of six million Jews. Since then there has perhaps been less talk of Judas from the pulpit, but the secular world already has his name imprinted into their collective memory!

The new Zealand Prime Minister is I'm sure right that the man who killed so many in Christchurch, and filmed himself doing it, wanted notoriety.

But was this true of Judas – did he do what he did to achieve notoriety? Or did he have another motive?

Motives

Did he think he was doing necessary work for God? In Matthew, straight after the Judas kiss, Jesus tells his betrayer: *"My friend, do what you are here for"* (26:50). And in John's account of the Last Supper, once Jesus has identified Judas as the one who will

betray him, he tells him: *“What you are going to do, do quickly”*(13:28).

So side by side with the explanation of Satanic possession, there is another possible explanation involving **divine** necessity. John’s Gospel combines the two explanations. Jesus hands Judas a piece of food, telling him to act quickly, and from that moment Satan entered into Judas ([John 13:26-27](#)).

This idea of Judas and Jesus as being complicit in the actions that led up to Jesus’ death is developed in the later ***Gospel of Judas***,

The 2nd-century [Gospel of Judas](#), is a text written in Greek, which depicts Judas as a collaborator and close confidant of Jesus. According to this apocryphal gospel—Judas was the only apostle who understood Jesus’ message. In the account of the gospel, during the celebration of [Passover](#), Jesus takes Judas aside and reveals secret knowledge about God and creation to him, even declaring that Judas is greater than the other apostles. Jesus seems to instruct Judas to report him to the authorities.

It could be argued that if Judas had not betrayed Jesus the Crucifixion would not have taken place, there would have been no Resurrection and no Christianity.

An alternative view of motive is that Judas was so disappointed that Jesus had not declared himself the Messiah and taken action to lead the Jews, that he decided to betray him as an act of revenge for what he saw as **Jesus' political betrayal** of his more Nationalist followers.

John Dart sets this theory out clearly:

I think we must ask the question: 'Did Judas feel betrayed by Jesus?' I think the answer is, 'Yes.'

We must remember that Jesus' incarnation, as the long awaited Messiah, was very different from what the Jews expected and felt had been promised in their scriptures.

One scholar has argued that **Judas never intended to betray Jesus**. Professor William Klassen says that the idea of betrayal is based on a mistranslation and that Judas intended not to 'betray' Jesus, but to 'hand over' Jesus to the authorities. There is ambivalence in the Greek word used to describe Judas as a betrayer. Although the verb *paradidomi* can be used in the sense of "betray," it can also mean "hand over" or "deliver." The very same word is used in the Gospels when Jesus himself speaks of the necessity of his being delivered to the authorities. So maybe Judas intended to bring Jesus and the authorities together in order to resolve their differences.

If Judas didn't intend a betrayal then that would explain his suicide when he became aware of the catastrophic consequence of his action.

We cannot know Judas' real motive in betraying Jesus to the authorities, but we do need to peel away what the centuries have laid on him.

Is he beyond redemption? Is anyone beyond redemption?

A poem by Catherine Fisher. She has seen a roundel of Jesus in Hell (The harrowing of Hell – Jesus going to bring out from Hell those who shouldn't be there.)

Jesus is seen embracing a man whose features, like Jesus' have been worn away. She wonders if this might be Judas?

Judas.

*Never in any church have I seen you;
never on windows or on squat misericords or carved
even in the dimmest, cobwebbed corner of a crypt;
and if I did, you would only be hanging,
clutching your silver ransom, offering
that treacherous kiss.
They never have anything good
to say of you, and who can blame them?*

Heretics are worse than unbelievers

in the eyes of the betrayed.

*Still, I wonder how you would look, how they might
portray you - whether the beard would be swarthy;
the eyes shifty, aslant -*

*because there is a roundel here of Christ in Hell,
embracing a man waist-deep in fiery glass
whose mediaeval face turns up as if in shock.*

*The features of both are gone, scrubbed by history
to a blaze of sunlight, as if that moment
transcended all colour, all the
glazier's power to create.*

*Perhaps it is something in the kiss
that makes me wonder if they meant it to be you.*

Catherine Fisher

Kay Garlick

With ref. to articles and papers by Peter Stanford, Bruce Chilton and David
Harsent